

GUYANA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the right to choose and change one's religion. An individual may, "alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, [establish or share] his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance." The government limited the number of visas for foreign representatives of religious groups based on historical trends, the relative size of the group, and the president's discretion; however, religious groups reported the visa quotas allotted to them did not affect their activities adversely, as the visa-limitation rule was rarely applied stringently.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

U.S. embassy officials met with representatives of major religious groups. Embassy representatives attended events hosted by Muslim and Hindu communities, including Eid and Diwali celebrations. Embassy officials engaged in social media discussions about religious freedom and tolerance after these events. The embassy hosted Muslim community leaders for an iftar and discussions on religious freedom

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 735,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2002 census, 57 percent of the population is Christian, 28 percent Hindu, 7 percent Muslim (mainly Sunni), and 2 percent belongs to other religious groups. Among Christian groups, Pentecostals make up 17 percent of the population; Roman Catholics, 8 percent; Anglicans, 7 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 5 percent; Methodists, 2 percent; and other Christians, 18 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Rastafarians and Bahais. An estimated 4 percent of the population does not profess any religious affiliation. Some religious groups assert greater numbers of members than reported in the 2002 census.

The membership of most religious groups includes a cross section of ethnic groups, although nearly all Hindus are of Indian descent and most Rastafarians are of African descent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

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Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of worship and religion. An individual may, “alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, [establish or share] his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” The law also protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret religious beliefs for themselves. An unenforced law requires a prison term of one year for a blasphemous libel conviction, but exempts religious expression made in “good faith and decent language.”

There is no system to register a religious group, but all places of worship must be registered with the government through the deeds registry to receive formal recognition. The deeds registry requires an organization to submit a proposed name and address for the place of worship, as well as the names of executive group members or congregation leaders. Once formally recognized, a place of worship falls under legislation governing not-for-profit organizations, which allows the group to conduct financial operations, buy property, and receive tax benefits in its name. Foreign religious workers require a visa from the Ministry of Citizenship. Religious groups seeking to enter Amerindian villages for the purpose of proselytizing must apply for and obtain the permission from the village council.

There are both public and private religiously affiliated schools. Religious education is compulsory in all private schools with a religious affiliation; however, religious education is not taught in public schools whether religiously affiliated or not. Most public schools’ religious affiliations are Anglican or Methodist.

Government Practices

The government limited the number of visas for foreign representatives of religious groups based on historical trends, the relative size of the group, and the president’s discretion; however, religious groups reported the visa quotas allotted to them did not adversely affect their activities, as the visa-limitation rule was rarely applied stringently.

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) coordinated with civilian religious groups to provide military personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of many religious groups conducted prayer services and counseling on GDF bases.

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Government representatives participated regularly in the observance of Christian, Muslim, and Hindu religious holidays throughout the year.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met with representatives of major religious groups. Embassy representatives attended events hosted by Muslim and Hindu communities, including Eid and Diwali celebrations. Embassy officials engaged in social media discussions about religious freedom and tolerance after these events. The embassy hosted Muslim community leaders for an iftar and discussions on religious freedom.