

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion. The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious reasons. Rastafarians said they disagreed with the government's ban on using marijuana, stating it was integral to their religious rituals.

Rastafarians stated they experienced discrimination in employment.

U.S. embassy officials met with the government, religious leaders, and other members of civil society to discuss religious freedom, including Rastafarians' complaints of societal discrimination and the government's policy against marijuana use.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 52,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17 percent of the population was Anglican; 16 percent Methodist; 11 percent Pentecostal; 7 percent Church of God; 6 percent Roman Catholic; 5 percent each Baptist, Moravian, Seventh day Adventist, and Wesleyan Holiness; 4 percent other; 2 percent each Brethren, evangelical, and Hindu; 1 percent each Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim, and Rastafarian; and less than 1 percent each Bahai, Presbyterian, and Salvation Army. Nine percent claimed no religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom of individuals to change their religion, and prohibits discrimination based on religious belief.

The Ministry of Social and Community Development is responsible for registering religious groups. Religious groups are not required to register, but may do so if

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desired. Registration provides the government with a database of contacts through which it disseminates information to the groups.

The constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain schools at the community's own expense.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes.

Government Practices

Public schools conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns as part of daily assemblies, but there is no policy specifically addressing other religions. Those who object are exempt from such prayers and hymns, as guaranteed by the constitution.

Rastafarians stated they continued to face discrimination, including cases in which public and private school officials refused to enroll Rastafarian children because of their belief against vaccinating their children. They stated this was in violation of national laws. The Ministry of Health stated school policies do not allow for any kind of discrimination and only children who have not received required immunizations are denied entry into school.

The ORU stated Rastafarians faced discrimination in observing religious holidays. The ORU stated government-run community development centers allow Christian groups to perform tree lighting ceremonies for Christmas at no charge, but Rastafari groups wishing to celebrate Kwanzaa are charged 400 East Caribbean dollars (\$148). ORU representatives also said that prisoners were forced to cut their hair and that the government did not accommodate vegetarian diets in prison. Rastafarian representatives also stated the government prohibited the use of marijuana, which they described as integral to their religious rituals.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the ORU, Rastafarians faced discrimination in seeking employment due to grooming rules and a stigma against individuals with dreadlocks.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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U.S. embassy officers engaged government officials on religious freedom issues. Embassy representatives discussed the impact of government policies and societal attitudes on Rastafarians with a leader of the Rastafarian community.