

THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy:

Report on Religious Freedom in Jamaica

Executive Summary

(1) Since its independence from Britain in 1962, Jamaica has been a Constitutional Parliamentary Democracy. The Jamaican Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and although the majority of citizens are Christian, that right has been upheld to all citizens of Jamaica.

THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy

(2) Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy is an international, inter-religious non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring freedom of religion as the foundation for security, stability, and democracy. THE INSTITUTE works globally to promote fundamental rights, and religious freedom in particular, with government policy-makers, religious leaders, business executives, academics, non-governmental organizations and others. THE INSTITUTE encourages and assists in the effective and cooperative advancement of religious freedom throughout the world.

History of Freedom and Politics in Jamaica

(3) According to the most recent census taken in 2001, 62.5% of Jamaican citizens are Protestant. Of that 62.5%, 10.8% are Seventh-Day Adventists, 9.5% are Pentecostal, 8.3% are members of the Church of God, 7.2% are Baptist, 6.3% are members of the New Testament Church of God, 4.8% are members of the Church of God in Jamaica, 4.3% are members of the Church of God of Prophecy, 3.6% are Anglican, and 7.7% are members of other Protestant denominations. 2.6% of the population of Jamaica is Roman Catholic, while 14.2% of the population is made up of all other religions such as Rastafarians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and others. 20.9% of the population is not affiliated with any religion.

Legal Status

(4) Jamaica is part of the Commonwealth Realm under Queen Elizabeth II. The government of Jamaica, however, is a Constitutional Parliamentary Democracy. According to the Constitution, Jamaica has no declared state religion.

(5) The Jamaican Constitution of 1962 guarantees freedom of conscience and religion. This includes the freedom to practice religion both publicly and privately, and the freedom of citizens to change their religious beliefs if they choose. The Constitution does make it clear, however, that these freedoms are only upheld so long as order is kept, and religion is not used as the excuse for injustice.

(6) Religious groups are not required to register with the Parliament. However, if a religious group is recognized by the government, they receive special privileges such as tax exemption status and the ability for their clergy to visit members of their denomination in jail.

Specific Instances of Religious Discrimination

(7) There have been no reports of religious discrimination in Jamaica over the past year. The only complaint filed for religious discrimination in Jamaica was by the Rastafarian community who claims that law enforcement officials have unfairly targeted them in the past. However, these claims have never been proved true. The attention of law enforcement officials on the Rastafarian community may be religious discrimination, but it seems to be more related to the illegal use of marijuana in Rastafarian religious practices.

(8) The Rastafarian religion is also not recognized by the government, which prevents them from performing legal marriage ceremonies.

US Foreign Policy

(9) According to the US State Department the US Government's foreign policy towards Jamaica is as follows: "The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights."

Conclusion

(10) Although small in size and young as a country, Jamaica is essentially free. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and so far that right has been upheld. In addition, the local media continues to be an open forum for discussion of religious matters.