



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Jamaica

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,244 square miles and a population of approximately 2.7 million. According to the most recent census (2001), the population's religious affiliation was: Church of God, 24 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; Pentecostal, 10 percent; Baptist, 7 percent; Anglican, 4 percent; Roman Catholic, 2 percent; United Church, 2 percent; Methodist, 2 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; Moravian, 1 percent; Brethren, 1 percent; unstated, 3 percent; and "other," 10 percent. The category "other" included 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Baha'is. The census reported that 21 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Shortly after being sworn into office at the end of March 2006, Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller instructed her cabinet to ensure that each government board had a pastor appointed to it. It was clear this initiative was directed at Christians; however, it appeared that religious leaders of all faiths could be eligible for appointment. Some criticized the initiative as an attempt to curry favor with Christians rather than as a practical proposal for effective government. Other critics argued that persons should be appointed to boards based on their expertise rather than their religious affiliation.

The Christian holy days of Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Parliament may act freely to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Foreign missionaries are subject to no restrictions other than the same immigration controls that govern other foreign visitors.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions, nor do they receive special treatment from the Government. Most religious schools are affiliated with either the Catholic Church or Protestant denominations; there also is at least one Jewish school.

##### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly targeted them; however, it was not clear whether the police actions reflected religious discrimination or were due to the group's illegal use of marijuana, which is an element of Rastafarian religious practice. In 2003 a parliamentary joint select committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use in private. Parliament considered the committee's recommendations but took no further action. In April 2006 the Senate passed a resolution to have the committee reconvene and conclude its deliberations, but by the end of the period covered by this report the committee had not met.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Local media outlets continued to provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on matters of religion.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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