

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion. According to Protestant and evangelical Christian religious groups, the government made concrete efforts to promote religious tolerance and freedom. Religious groups were generally supportive of government COVID-19 mitigation efforts, and during the year, Prime Minister Timothy Harris praised the cooperation of religious groups in addressing the pandemic.

The St. Kitts and Nevis Christian Council, which includes the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic Churches, the Salvation Army, and the Evangelical Association, including the Church of God and Pentecostal Assemblies, continued to promote joint activities encouraging tolerance in schools. A representative from the small Jewish community on the island of Nevis said the community enjoyed excellent relations with the Christian churches on the island and felt welcomed and supported.

U.S. embassy officials met with representatives of the government, including from the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, on issues of religious freedom, including the importance of respect for religious diversity and tolerance. During the year, embassy officials engaged with representatives of the evangelical Christian, Rastafarian, and Jewish communities. The embassy promoted National Religious Freedom Day, as well as Chinese Lunar New Year, Holi, Easter, and Ramadan on the embassy's official social media platforms.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 54,000 (midyear 2021). According to the U.S. government, 74.4 percent of the population is Protestant, 6.7 percent Catholic, and 1.7 percent Rastafarian. Jehovah's Witnesses are 1.3 percent; others are 7.6 percent, 5.2 percent state no religious affiliation, and 3.2 percent of the population does not specify. According to the 2011 census, 17 percent of the population is 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; and 2 percent each Brethren, evangelical Christian, and Hindu. An additional 1 percent each is Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim, and Rastafarian; less

than 1 percent each is Baha'i, Presbyterian, and Salvation Army. Nine percent state no religious affiliation.

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. It prohibits discrimination based on religious belief.

The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs is responsible for registering religious groups. Religious groups are not required to register, but doing so provides the government with a database of contacts through which it disseminates information on government policy for religious groups. Registration also allows religious groups to act as charities and to import religious items duty-free.

The constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain schools at the groups' own expense. Public schools offer Christian religious instruction, daily prayers, and religious assemblies. Students who do not want to attend are exempt from all religious activities. Public and private schools require vaccinations for children to attend school, but religious exemptions are permitted.

The law permits the private use of marijuana away from public places, including for religious activities, as well as in registered places of worship for members of the Rastafarian faith. The law does not prohibit the wearing of dreadlocks however, businesses may restrict the practice for safety or hygiene reasons. Occupational safety and health laws require all employees, including those with dreadlocks, to cover their hair when using dangerous equipment, handling food, or undertaking health-related activities.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

According to Protestant and evangelical Christian groups, the government took several actions to support and promote religious freedom and tolerance. Prime Minister Harris regularly visited and attended religious services of different faiths. In January, while congratulating the Catholic Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre on

its 50th anniversary, the Prime Minister said the Catholic Church had been an important partner in the government's efforts to develop the country. In February, while attending a worship service at a Baptist church, the Prime Minister applauded the "church community" for the important role it played in educating and assisting parents to help them raise their children in faith. In March, the Prime Minister commended the role of churches, praising church leadership for their support and discipline in application of COVID-19 protocols. In October, Prime Minister Harris called on churches to become even more active in serving the needs of the country's citizens and residents.

According to the president of the Evangelical Association and media reports, faith-based organizations and religious leaders were generally supportive of the government's policies and consultations with religious leaders throughout COVID-19-related lockdowns during the year. In May, members of the board, management, and staff of the government-owned Development Bank of St. Kitts and Nevis attended a Seventh-day Adventist thanksgiving worship commemorating the 40th anniversary of the bank and asked church members in attendance to keep the bank in their prayers so that it could continue to make a sustained difference in the lives of individuals. In July, the cabinet, in collaboration with the St. Kitts Christian Council, the St. Kitts Evangelical Association, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, recorded and broadcast a National Day of Prayer service to encourage interfaith prayer for protection during the Atlantic hurricane season and for healing from the impact of COVID-19. Media reported that on August 1, Prime Minister Harris worshipped at the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church to celebrate the church's actions that helped to reopen the country following a COVID-19 lockdown.

The government continued, within limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) for public and private schools. During much of the year, schools remained closed due to COVID-19, affecting the operation of the NSCP. The Ministry of Health continued to require immunization of all children before enrolling in school but allowed waivers for unvaccinated Rastafarian children to attend public schools. Some children of the Rastafarian community were homeschooled.

Prison officials continued to allow Rastafarian prisoners to keep their dreadlocks unless they posed health-related issues or were used to transport contraband. The prison did not provide different diets based on prisoners' religious dietary restrictions.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The St. Kitts and Nevis Christian Council, which includes the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian, and Catholic Churches, the Salvation Army, and the Evangelical Association, including the Church of God and Pentecostal Assemblies, continued to promote joint activities that particularly encouraged tolerance for religious diversity in schools. The president of the Evangelical Association reported interfaith dialogue between his association and the Christian Council continued on other topics, although the dialogue was less frequent due to COVID-19 restrictions. The small Jewish community on the island of Nevis reported it had excellent relations with the Christian churches on the island and felt welcomed and supported, including being invited by Christians to share in holiday celebrations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials engaged representatives of the government, including from the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, on issues of religious freedom and the importance of respect for religious diversity and tolerance. In March, embassy officials engaged with representatives of the Evangelical Association and discussed religious freedom in the country. On August 22-23, an embassy official met with a representative of the Jewish community to discuss religious tolerance in Nevis and visited the Jewish cemetery in Charlestown. In August, an embassy official held meetings with members of the Rastafarian community in Saint Kitts, and also on the island of Nevis. The embassy promoted National Religious Freedom Day in January, as well as Chinese Lunar New Year, Holi, Easter, and Ramadan, on the embassy's official social media platforms.