

SAINT LUCIA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and individuals' right to change, manifest, and propagate the religion of their choosing. It grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain schools and provide religious instruction. The law requires religious groups with more than 250 members to register with the government.

The Religious Affairs Council, an official entity consisting of representatives of registered Christian groups and one non-Christian representative, all elected by their respective communities, and a nonvoting government official, continued to meet during the year. According to government-published COVID-19 protocols, registered and unregistered faith groups were able to hold in-person religious services during the year. The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment required religious groups to submit an application and a COVID-19 response plan to resume in-person assembly.

The Christian Council continued to hold interdenominational meetings. Two faith-based organizations (FBOs) provided monthly religious counseling and psychosocial care to youth at the Boys Training Center, which the government created to provide care, protection, and rehabilitation of vulnerable young boys.

U.S. embassy officials raised with government interlocutors the importance of religious freedom and interfaith relations in promoting respect for religious diversity in the country. They also discussed the value of faith-based groups in providing public services. The embassy's public messaging on social media reinforced respect for religious freedom and diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 167,000 (midyear 2022). According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the latest available, Catholics are 61.4 percent of the population; Seventh-day Adventists, 10.4 percent; Pentecostals, 8.8 percent; evangelical Christians, 2.2 percent; Baptists, 2.1 percent; and Rastafarians, 2 percent. Other groups together constituting less

than 2 percent of the population include Anglicans, members of the Church of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is. Nearly 6 percent of the population claims no religious affiliation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has approximately 250 members in the country. Unofficial estimates of the Muslim population, which is mainly Sunni, range from 150 to 400 individuals. According to representatives of the Jewish community, there are approximately 200 Jewish residents, most of whom are noncitizens.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states "a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of" freedom of conscience, including of thought and religion, and in the manifestation and propagation of religion or belief through practice, worship, teaching, and observance. It protects individuals' rights to change their religion and prohibits religious instruction without consent in schools, prisons, and military service. A blasphemy law exists but is not enforced.

The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment is responsible for religious affairs and implements the government's FBO policy. FBOs may apply to register if they meet the required threshold of at least 250 members. To register, groups must provide contact information, their establishment date and history, declaration of belief, number of members, location of meeting place, and income sources. FBOs are encouraged to seek incorporation as a bona fide nonprofit organization under the Companies Act. Registered groups are eligible to receive associated benefits. Unregistered groups may or may not have recognition status with the government. An unregistered group that submits a "notification of existence," which includes identifying the group's leadership, will receive correspondence acknowledging the group's existence. After receiving the notification of existence, a group is then able to incorporate under the Companies Act. After incorporation, the entity becomes a legal person for taxation purposes including for land registration and deeds of sale. Registration costs 500 Eastern Caribbean dollars (\$190). After registration with the ministry and incorporation as a legal entity, a religious group may apply for concessions, including duty-free concessions on certain imported goods, departure tax and ticket tax waivers from the Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority, and exemption from work permits.

Formal government registration also allows registered religious groups legally to register births, marriages, and deaths officiated by religious leaders.

Ministry of Education regulations require the vaccination of all schoolchildren, before they enter public or private school; however, the ministry grants exemptions based on religion. The public-school curriculum includes religious studies; the Ministry of Education does not require students to participate in these classes. The classes familiarize students with the core beliefs of world religions rather than promoting any particular faith. The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain what are known as “assisted” schools, such as those sponsored by the Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Anglican Churches. The government provides approximately 50 percent of the funding for assisted schools but does not cover expenses for classes on religion. All students may attend assisted schools regardless of belief or nonbelief.

The government’s registration policy defines the process of obtaining work and labor permits for missionaries. Immigration authorities grant work permits for individuals entering the country to conduct missionary work in exchange for the payment of a weekly fee of 200 Eastern Caribbean dollars (\$74). Providing that they abide by the law, foreign missionaries face no other restrictions or obligations.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The Religious Affairs Council, an official entity consisting of representatives of registered Christian groups and one non-Christian representative elected by their respective religious groups and a nonvoting government official, continued to meet during the year. Although competitive elections were scheduled to occur every three years among the Islamic Association as well as the Jewish, Baha’i, Rastafarian, and Buddhist communities to select the non-Christian seat on the council, the last election and accompanying government consultations with FBOs occurred in 2018, with the selection of a Rastafarian. According to government officials, COVID-19 health protocols prompted the cancelation of the 2021 consultations and election. The country’s budget preparation cycle for fiscal year 2023-2024 began in October, and in the same month, the Ministry of Equity,

Social Justice and Empowerment proposed to hold the next consultations on budgetary allocations in September 2023. If approved, elections are scheduled to be held in 2023 to determine the new composition of the Religious Affairs Council.

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The government met regularly with FBOs, who have representation on the National Emergency Management Advisory Committee chaired by the Prime Minister, to discuss assistance to vulnerable populations and other social issues. For example, in March, the government and FBOs held a one-day consultation on the impact of COVID-19 on FBOs and their members. The government also participated with the Saint Lucian Christian Council to discuss the country's cannabis policy; in 2021, the government decriminalized the use of up to 30 grams (approximately one ounce) for personal use. During the year, FBOs contributed to the planning and execution of the annual National Independence Day Ecumenical Service.

Rastafarian elders met with Joachim Henry, the Minister of Equality Social Justice, and Empowerment, who is responsible for ecclesiastical affairs, on several occasions to discuss the appointment of a new position, religious status officer, to officiate at birth registrations, marriages, and funerals for members of the Rastafarian community. At year's end, no successful candidate had run for the position and the government was unable to fill it. The Rastafarian community also discussed with government officials the decriminalization of cannabis, which Rastafarians use during their religious ceremonies. In September, the Ministry of Education responded to public conversations regarding school regulations pertaining to acceptable hairstyles and consulted with those concerned regarding these policies, including the Rastafarian community.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Christian Council continued to hold interdenominational meetings. Two FBOs, Saint Lucia Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Divine Encounter Glory House Ministry, provided monthly religious counseling and psychosocial care to youth at the Boys Training Center, which the government established to provide care, protection, and rehabilitation of vulnerable young boys. Because of limited government resources, the Catholic Church provided temporary shelter to victims of human trafficking, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials raised with officials of the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, and Empowerment and the Ministry of External Affairs, International Trade, Civil Aviation, and Diaspora Affairs the importance of religious freedom and interfaith relations in promoting respect for religious and other diversity in the country. They also discussed the contributions of faith-based groups in providing public services to the community. The embassy's public messaging on social media reinforced these principles and values, including a message in recognition of Religious Freedom Day stating, "Everyone should feel safe attending a religious service, school, a community center event, or while walking down the street wearing the symbols of their faith. We can only fully realize the freedom we wish for ourselves by helping to ensure liberty for all. On Religious Freedom Day, let us rededicate ourselves to these fundamental principles."