

GUYANA

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Officers of the U.S. embassy at all levels met with leaders in the religious community. Embassy officers also met with members of U.S. religious organizations, including the Hindu diaspora, who are involved in significant community projects within the country. The U.S. government, through the Humanitarian Assistance Program, worked with a local Muslim organization to build public-private relationships between government officials in the country and private institutions for better coordination in providing services, such as medical care to at-risk populations. The U.S. government advocated for a less restrictive visa policy toward religious workers.

Section I. Religious Demography

A 2002 census on religious affiliation indicated that approximately 57 percent of the population is Christian with 17 percent Pentecostal, 8 percent Roman Catholic, 7 percent Anglican, 5 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 20 percent other Christian groups. Approximately 28 percent of the population is Hindu, 7 percent Muslim (mostly Sunni), and 2 percent practice other beliefs, including the Rastafari Movement and the Baha'i Faith. An estimated 4 percent of the population does not profess any religion. Some religious groups claim greater numbers of members than reported in the 2002 census.

The country is ethnically diverse, reflecting East Indian, African, Chinese, and European ancestry, as well as a significant indigenous population. Most religious groups can claim membership from a cross section of ethnic groups, with two exceptions: most Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, and nearly all Rastafarians are Afro-Guyanese.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The law protects the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to interpret religious beliefs for themselves. Members of all religious groups worship freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion.

While the government recognizes religious groups of all faiths, they must register to receive formal recognition. Religious groups seeking to establish formal operations must first obtain permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The government limits the number of foreign religious organization representatives allowed in the country based on historic trends and on the discretion of the president. Access to Amerindian areas requires the permission of the local village council.

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents were free to send their children to the school of their choice.

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) coordinated with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major religious groups conducted prayer services and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons were given on GDF bases. Although no official GDF policy required attendance at religious services, anecdotal evidence from GDF officers suggested that individual commanders required attendance at some religious programs. Membership in a particular religion did not confer any specific advantage or disadvantage; however, general military practice tended to be oriented toward Christians.

The government observed the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Christmas, Phagwah, Diwali, Youman Nabi (Maulid al-Nabi), and Eid Al-Adha.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials maintained contact with the religious community by meeting with representatives of major religious groups, attending local religious holiday celebrations and events sponsored by local religious organizations, and including religious leaders at embassy functions. The U.S. government advocated for fair and open access for all religious groups seeking to operate in the country.