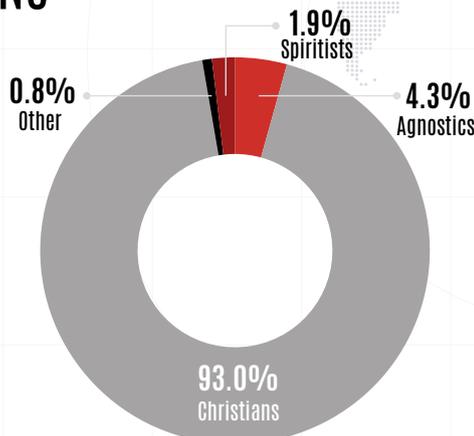




BAHAMAS

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Respect for Christian values and the rule of law are highlighted in the Preamble to the Bahamian constitution,¹ which also upholds the supremacy of God and enshrines the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.

Article 15 of the constitution stipulates that every individual has the right to the protection of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, always subject to the respect of the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex.

Article 18 upholds the right of conscientious objection to military service.

Under Article 22 (1), no one can be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change their religion or beliefs, to manifest and propagate them through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either individually or collectively, in public or in private.

Article 22 (2) states that no one attending an educational

establishment can receive religious instruction or take part in a religious ceremony or observance that is not of the religion they profess without their consent (or that of their guardian in the case of minors under the age of 18).

Article 22 (3) stipulates that no religious body or denomination can be prevented or hindered from providing religious education to its members, notwithstanding any government subsidies they might receive.

Lastly, Article 22 (4) affirms that no one can be forced to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or beliefs.

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

The Rastafarian community demanded that the right to the religious use of cannabis be recognised.² In June 2019 they announced plans to sue the government over its refusal to allow it, arguing that it is a violation of their constitutional right to religious freedom.³

In June 2019, a ceremony was held to mark the start of the reconstruction of the Zion Baptist Community Church, which had been destroyed in a fire. Pastors from other Churches were present at the event.⁴

Several US-based Churches came to the aid of Bahamians after the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian in September 2019.⁵

In November 2019, celebrations marked 130 years of Catholic education in the Bahamas.⁶

In March 2020, religious and civic authorities took steps to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the temporary closure of churches and other places of worship.⁷

In May 2020, Bishop Walter Hanchell, president of the Great Commission Churches, complained that the government was giving priority “to businesses that promote vices” over the Church when considering easing lockdown restrictions.⁸

That same month, the government allowed the reopening

of churches under strict social distancing guidelines. The first step was to authorise “drive-up services”, whereby parishioners must stay in their cars without the possibility of receiving communion.⁹

PROSPECTS FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION

In the 2018-2020 period, no incidents of intolerance or discrimination on religious groups have been reported, except for the religion that promotes the sacramental use of cannabis and alleges discrimination. The situation remains without significant changes and the prospects for freedom of religion are positive for the foreseeable future.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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