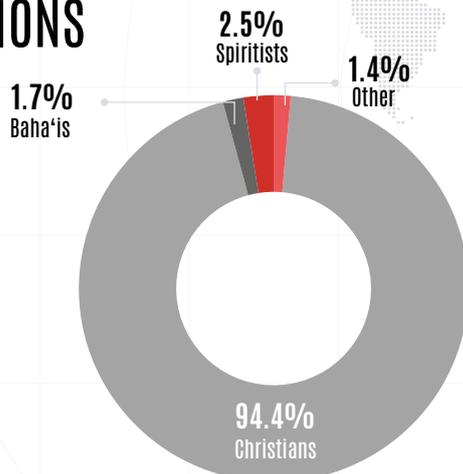




DOMINICA

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

According to the Preamble of the Constitution,¹ the people of Dominica believe that the country's founding principles are the supremacy of God, faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity of the human person, and the equal and inalienable rights with which all people are endowed by their Creator.

Dominica protects the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest.

Article 1 (b) of the Constitution states that these freedoms include, inter alia, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.

Article 4 (3, c) recognises the right to conscientious objection to military service.

In Article 9 (1), the Constitution declares that no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and ob-

servance, alone or with others, in public or in private.

Article 9 (2) stipulates that, except with their own consent (or that of their guardian in case of minors), no one attending a place of education or detained in prison or serving in the Armed Forces shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part or attend any religious ceremony that is not of their own religion.

Article 9 (3) equally stipulates that every religious community has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, places of education and shall not be hindered or prevented from providing education and religious instruction to its members, irrespective of whether they receive government subsidies or not. Equally, Article 9 (4) says that no person shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or creed.

Religious groups can be recognised as non-profit organisations, provided they register with the Ministry of Justice.² Such requests must be signed by five directors of the religious entity in question who must provide the number and place where their religious services are celebrated. Places of worship are also subject to registration and can only be used for religious purposes.³

Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost Monday and Christmas are national holidays.⁴

Dominica has a national prayer as part of its national symbols.⁵

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the period under review, there have been reports by the Rastafarian community about discrimination and police harassment for their continued use of marijuana for their ceremonial acts.⁶

In late May 2020, some churches reopened after being locked down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst complying with government health care guidelines and measures, some places of worship required participants to register for contact tracing in case of infectious outbreaks.⁷

In September 2020, the authorities, along with religious leaders, held a day of reflection and prayer for those who lost their lives during Hurricane María in 2017.⁸

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In the period under review (2018-2020), no cases of religious intolerance have been reported. Instead, Dominica stands out as one of the first countries in the region to reopen places of worship following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic whilst complying with government health protocols. The prospects for religious freedom remain positive.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

1 Dominica 1978 (Rev. 2014), Constitute Project, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Dominica_2014?lang=en (accessed 21st September 2020).

2 Office of International Religious Freedom, "Dominica," 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/dominica/> (accessed 21st September 2020).

3 Ibid.

4 "Public Holidays," Web Portal of the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, <http://www.dominica.gov.dm/about-dominica/public-holidays> (accessed 21st March 2020).

5 "National Prayer," Web Portal of the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, <http://www.dominica.gov.dm/about-dominica/national-symbols/national-prayer> (accessed 21st March 2020).

6 Office of international Religious Freedom, op.cit.

7 "Churches in Dominica open to down-sized congregations," Dominica News Online, 31st May 2020, <https://dominicanewsonline.com/news/covid-19/in-pictures-covid-19-churches-in-dominica-open-to-down-sized-congregations/> (accessed 8th September 2020).

8 "Remembering Maria: Dominica holds hour of prayer & reflection," DaVibes, 18th September 2020. <https://www.dominicavibes.dm/featured-267514/> (accessed 21st September 2020).