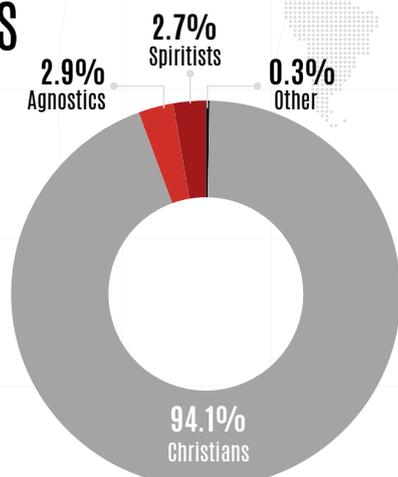




HAITI

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution of Haiti¹ stipulates that all religions and beliefs will be freely exercised in the country and that everyone has the right to profess their religion and practise their faith, provided that this right is exercised in such a way that it does not interfere with public order and peace (Article 30).

Article 30 (1) states that no one can be forced to belong to a religious organisation or follow any teaching that is contrary to their beliefs. Article 30 (2) sets the conditions for the recognition and practice of religions and faiths.

Under Article 35 (4), labour unions are essentially considered as non-political, non-profit and non-denominational.

Foreign nationals, as well as religious groups, humanitarian organisations and educational institutions can own property under Article 55 (2).

As stipulated in Article 135-1, in taking the oath of office, the President of the Republic must say: "I swear before God and the Nation".

In accordance with Article 187, members of the High Court of Justice must also say: "I swear before God and before the Nation to judge with the impartiality and the firmness appropriate to an honest and free man, according to my conscience and my deep-seated conviction."

As set out in Article 215, centres of African belief are regarded as part of the nation's heritage and are protected by the state.

A concordat with the Holy See allows the Vatican to choose a number of bishops with the government's consent. On this basis, the Haitian government provides economic support for Catholic priests and churches.²

Legally, religious organisations must register with the Ministry of Religious Affairs as well as submit an annual activity update. Registration gives religious organisations some tax exemptions. The Ministry of Justice allows members of the clergy of registered religious groups to issue civil documents, like baptism and marriage certificates.³

Voodoo was recognised as a religion in 2003.

Muslim communities (Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyya) have sought official recognition, but have not yet received a response from the Ministry; for this reason, Muslim marriag-

es are not recognised and Muslims must be civilly married.⁴

Haiti is a member of the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In August 2019, the government allocated annual funds for registered Catholic and Protestant schools, in line with the Vatican-Haiti concordat and due to the number of schools the Protestant and Anglican Churches maintain. According to the National Council for Haitian Muslims, the government did not allocate funds to the four registered Muslim primary schools.⁵

Between September and November 2019 there were numerous violent demonstrations by citizens protesting the increase in prices and the social and economic crisis. In October 2019, Archbishop Leroy Mésidor of Port-au-Prince urged Haitian President Jovenel Moïse to listen to “the voice of wisdom” in order to overcome the crisis in which the country found itself.⁶ That same month the Haitian Conference of Religious (CHR) announced plans to hold a “silent national march” to express concern over the country’s humanitarian crisis.⁷

In May 2020, with the number of COVID-19 cases rising, the Haitian government extended the state of emergency

for two months, thus keeping various establishments, including places of worship, closed.⁸

Voodoo leaders noted that “the health system is not able to respond to the challenge of the pandemic”; for this reason, they said they were prepared to receive patients in their places of worship and treat them with natural remedies.⁹

In July 2020, Evangelical Christians protested in Port-au-Prince against the new Penal Code, signed into law by the president, which among other changes, legalized abortion and lowered the legal age for consensual sex to 15.¹⁰

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

No violations of religious freedom and no evident trends of intolerance or discrimination were recorded during the period under review. Equality before the law, specifically for Muslims, remains an issue.

Haiti continues to be mired in a humanitarian crisis, compounded by enduring political crises. During the 2018-2020 period, religious leaders called for action to place the common good above personal interests. The increasing political and economical duress under which a majority of the population live, means that religious charitable institutions remain key to maintaining human dignity.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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