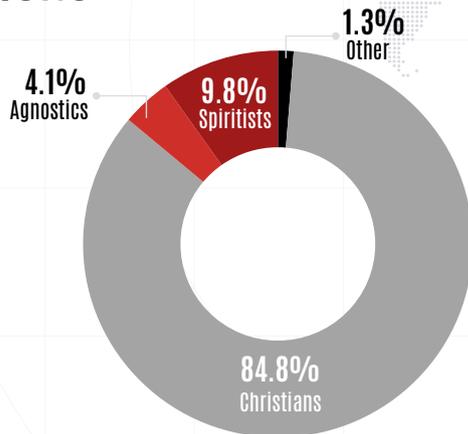




JAMAICA

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution of Jamaica¹ stipulates (Article 13) that the state has an obligation to promote universal respect and observance of human rights and personal freedoms, to which everyone is entitled by virtue of their inherent dignity as human beings.

Article 13 also recognises freedom of thought, conscience, belief and observance of political doctrines, the right of association and equality before the law as well as the right not to be discriminated against because of one’s religion.

According to Article 14, anyone detained has the right to communicate with and be visited by a religious counsellor.

Article 17 enshrines the right to religious freedom, which includes the right to change one’s religion and to manifest one’s belief, alone or with others, in public or in private, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

The same article stipulates that a religious organisation cannot be altered without the consent of its governing authority. It goes on to say that every religious organisation has the right to provide religious instruction to its mem-

bers, irrespective of whether it receives public funds or not.

Article 17 also indicates that, except with their own consent (or that of their parents or guardian in case of minors), no person attending an education establishment shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend a ceremony of any religion other than their own.

Various officials must take an oath of allegiance before taking office. The oath includes the final phrase “So help me God”.

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In September 2018, Dr. Garth Anderson, president of the Jamaica Teachers’ Association, expressed concern over the shortage of religious educators.² Nadine Chambers, a teacher of religion, noted that principals are the ones who refuse to hire specialists to teach the subject.³

In January 2019, the leaders of several churches rallied in front of Gordon House (Jamaica’s parliament building) to express their pro-life message and reject abortion, whilst a motion to decriminalise it was being discussed inside.⁴

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In mid-May 2020, Jamaica was set to ease restrictions imposed following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, so as to allow churches to reopen during a trial period. Religious services resumed under an agreement with religious groups.⁵

In July 2020, the Supreme Court issued a ruling regarding a girl excluded from school because of her dreadlocks. In its decision, “the court accepted and reaffirmed, the position that Rastafarianism is a widely practiced religion, and that the expression by the appellant of his [sic] religious beliefs in the form of dreadlocks is protected.”⁶

No acts of vandalism have been reported since the 2016-2018 period. The incidents that have occurred are indicative that issues are openly debated. More broadly, religious freedom is appreciated and people can express their beliefs. Prospects for the future of religious freedom in the country thus appear good.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

1 Jamaica 1962 (rev. 2015), Constitute Project, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993?lang=en (accessed 31st October 2020).

2 Erica Virtue, “Gleaner Editors’ Forum geography, history & religious education teachers also in short supply,” *The Gleaner*, 14th September 2018, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20180916/gleaner-editors-forum-geography-history-religious-education-teachers-also> (accessed 31st March 2020).

3 Carlene Davis, “Religious snub – Re teachers says principals are not employing them,” *The Gleaner*, 2nd November 2018, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20181111/religious-snob-re-teacher-says-principals-are-not-employing-them> (accessed 31st March 2020).

4 “Church leads protest against abortion,” *The Star*, 31st January 2019, <http://jamaica-star.com/article/features/20190131/church-leads-protest-against-abortion> (accessed 31st March 2020).

5 “Jamaica set to relax restrictions on Churches and bars amid Covid-19 outbreak,” *VOA News*, 12th May 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/jamaica-set-relax-restrictions-churches-and-bars-amid-covid-19-outbreak> (accessed 8th August 2020).

6 “Virgo, Dale and ZV v Board of Management of Kensington Primary School, Minister of Education, Attorney General of Jamaica and Office of the Children’s Advocate,” Case Number: 2018 HCV 02728, date of Delivery: 31.07.2020, p. 54, The Supreme Court of Jamaica, <https://supremecourt.gov.jm/content/virgo-dale-and-zv-v-board-management-kensington-primary-school-minister-education-attorney> (accessed 2nd November 2020).