

Haiti



Stable / Unchanged 

Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **94.2%**
- Agnostics : **2.7%**
- Spiritists : **2.7%**
- Others : **0.4%**

10,848,000

27,750 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution^[1] stipulates that all religions and beliefs shall be exercised freely. Article 30 states that everyone has the right to profess their religion and practise their faith, provided that the exercise of this right does not interfere with public order and peace.

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.

The law sets the conditions for the recognition and practice of religions and faiths, set out in article 30-2.

Labour unions are essentially non-political, non-profit and non-denominational, according to article 35-4.

Foreign nationals and religious, humanitarian or educational institutions are guaranteed under article 55-2 the right to own private property.

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 protected by the state.

Although Roman Catholicism is not the official religion, a concordat was signed with the Holy See in 1860 and amended in 1984. Under its terms, the Government of Haiti provides economic support for Catholic priests, churches and schools!^[2]

The law regulates the recognition and operation of religious groups. The Bureau of Worship registers churches, members of the clergy and missionaries of the various confessions. Religious groups that register can have their marriage and baptisms recognised in civil law. They also enjoy some tax exemptions but must submit an annual report of their activities.^[3]

Vodou worship centres and practises are recognised but marriages performed by Vodou priests are not recognised in civil law. Islam too is not recognised; thus, Islamic marriages cannot be registered civilly!^[4]

In October 2017, three Haitian senators travelled to Benin, a small African nation, on a research trip as part of a plan to reform the country's Penal Code, which dates back to 19th century.^[5] In both nations, part of the population adheres to spiritualistic beliefs. The goal is to modernise the code. The senators also wanted to see how a country can legislate in the area of crimes related to religion.^[6]

Some Christian and Muslim groups operate informally, without seeking official recognition!^[7]

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976!^[8]

| Incidents

In November 2016, a former Haitian senator, a Muslim, said that he met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship. He and his fellow Muslims are still waiting for an answer to the request for official registration of the Muslim religion!^[9]

| Prospects for freedom of religion

The socio-political condition of Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, continues to be a source of concern. After the political crisis of 2015, when elections were cancelled as a result of accusations of fraud, Haitians elected new leaders in November 2016. This came shortly after Hurricane Matthew, which hit the country in October 2016, worsening a bad situation caused by the 2010 earthquake.^[10] Since then, Catholic Church organisations have continued to hand out basic aid to the victims – food and hygiene products – collected by parishes and dioceses!^[11]

It is probable that the lack of overt incidents of intolerance or religious discrimination might stem from the state of precariousness in which the population lives due to natural disasters. As in the previous period, Islam, which has not yet received any official recognition, ostensibly continues to be discriminated against.

In the case of Vodou believers, although they are registered, their marriage and baptism ceremonies are not recognised. Thus, no greater recognition has been granted to minority religions. For Haiti, offering the same legal treatment to all religious confessions remains a challenge.

| Endnotes / Sources

[1]Haiti's Constitution of 1987 with Amendments through 2012, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Haiti_2012.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 23rd March 2018).

[2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Haiti', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 9th March 2018).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] 'Haití Looks To Benin For Guidance On Voodoo Crimes', The Haitian Times, 11th October 2017, <https://haitiantimes.com/2017/10/11/haiti-looks-to-benin-for-guidance-on-voodoo-crimes/>, (accessed 8th March 2018).

[6] 'Religion in Haiti', Aid for Haiti, <http://www.aidforhaiti.org/learn-more/about-haiti/religion-in-haiti>, (accessed 8th March 2018).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] L. Herasme, 'El reencuentro de Haití y el Islam', Leo Noticia, 16th November 2016, <http://leonoticia.com/el-reencuentro-de-haiti-y-el-islam/>, (accessed 19th March 2018).

[10] 'Elecciones en Haití: cómo vota un país sumido en una profunda crisis', BBC Mundo, 20th November 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-38043333>, (accessed 20th March 2018).

[11] 'Cáritas se moviliza para ayudar a los damnificados por el huracán en Haití', Zenit, 11th October 2016, <https://es.zenit.org/articles/caritas-se-moviliza-para-ayudar-a-los-damnificados-por-el-huracan-en-haiti/>, (accessed 19th March 2018).