



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **91.3%**
- Baha'is : **2.5%**
- Hindus : **2.0%**
- Jews : **1.0%**
- Spiritists : **1.0%**
- Others : **2.2%**

367,000

22,966 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution^[1] recognises the “supremacy of God” and expresses faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights given by God to everyone.

The constitution guarantees these fundamental freedoms subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest, which includes, among others, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, regardless of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex (Article 3).

Freedom of conscience is protected, including freedom of thought and religion, as well as the freedom to change one’s religion or belief, to manifest and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, alone or with others, in public or in private (Article 11, section 1).

Except with their own consent (or that of their parents or guardian in the case of minors under 18 years of age), no person attending a place of education or held 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 11, section 2).

All state recognised religious communities have the right to establish and maintain educational establishments at their own expense. Nor will they be impeded from providing education and religious instruction to their members, irrespective of whether the communities in question receive government subsidies (Article 11, section 3).

No one shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or belief (Article 11, section 4).

No law may be discriminatory in itself or in its effects, where discrimination means the different treatment of people by

reason of their sex, race, place of origin, political opinions, colour or creed (Article 16).

The Governor General appoints one of the twelve members of the Senate in accordance with the recommendation by the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches (Article 61, section 4, clause c).

Religious groups must register with the Companies Registry as do businesses. Registration allows religious organisations to operate legally in the country and be recognised by the state. The government may close the facilities of groups that do not register.

Churches and other places of worship are exempt from paying property taxes.^[2]

Religious organisations can operate in partnership with the state to operate or manage schools, hospitals and other charities and receive financial assistance from the government.^[3]

Foreign religious workers require a religious worker's visa to enter the country and pro-selytise.^[4]

The public school curriculum includes non-denominational 'spirituality' classes, including the teaching of morals, values and religions of the world. Parents can decide whether their children will attend these classes or not.^[5]

A Christian chaplain is integrated in the country's Armed Forces. Clergy from other religious groups can serve inmates in prison.^[6]

Incidents

In September 2017, the Belize Council of Churches issued a statement opposing a decision to hold the Tenth Day parade, a national holiday that commemorates the Battle of Saint George's Caye, on a Sunday, the Lord's Day for Christians. The Churches stated that the timing of the event made it difficult for people to attend Sunday worship and undermined the country's religious tradition and heritage.^[7]

In November 2017, the country's Attorney General, Michael Peyrefitte, harshly criticised the role played by the National Evangelical Association in a debate over the decriminalisation of cannabis. He claimed that clergy had no moral authority over those smoking cannabis and said pastors should be in their churches, praying.^[8]

In February 2018, the Catholic Church's challenge to the August 2016 legalisation of sex between people of the same gender hit a setback when the Church's lawyer pulled out. It meant the Church had no representation.^[9] After the legislation was passed, the government announced an appeal but one that focused only on the question of "sex" as it appears in the constitution to include "sexual orientation".^[10] Such a step gave the Catholic Church the possibility of appealing the legislation in its entirety. However, given its lack of representation, the Church runs the risk of being excluded from the case.^[11]

Prospects for freedom of religion

The incidents that occurred during the period under review are symptomatic of tensions between the Churches and the government. Although there were no recorded incidents of religious intolerance – unlike the previous reporting period – the 2016-18 time frame saw an increasing discord between the Church, with its restatement of traditional beliefs, and the authorities which are promoting more liberal values.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] All articles cited are from Belize's Constitution of 1981 with Amendments through 2011, [constitute-project.org, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Belize_2011.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Belize_2011.pdf) lang=en, (accessed 6th March 2018).

[2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Belize', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 6th March 2018).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] 'Churches Frown on Sunday Tenth Parade', News5, 4th September, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/152215>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[8] 'Peyrefitte to Churches: Put Up, Light Up, Or Shut Up', 7NewsBelize, 3rd November 2017, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=42518&frmsrch=1>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[9] 'Church Pulls a Disappearing Act in UNIBAM Appeal', 7NewsBelize, 2nd February 2018, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=43590&frmsrch=1>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[10] 'The Section 53 Appeal: Are Catholics Out?', News5, 2nd February 2018, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/160001>, (accessed 12th March 2018).

[11] 'Catholic Church lawyer pulls out of Section 53 appeal', Breaking Belize News, 3rd February 2018, <https://www.breakingbelizenews.com/2018/02/03/catholic-church-lawyer-pulls-out-of-section-53-appeal/>, (accessed 5th March 2018).