

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

A guide

Barbados





“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

— United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18



FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND WORSHIP

1. What is the right to freedom of religion and worship?

The right to freedom of religion and worship means that every person is free to choose, change, or reject any religion and to practice their beliefs through worship, teaching, and observance, either privately or publicly, individually or corporately. It also protects individuals from being forced to follow a religion or take part in religious activities against their will, while allowing reasonable limits to protect public safety and the rights of others.

2. What is the right to freedom of belief or conscience?

The right to freedom of belief or conscience means that every person is free to hold their own thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about religion without interference. It also protects the choice to change those beliefs and to live according to them, as long as doing so respects the rights and safety of others.

3. What are the laws that protect religious freedom?

The Constitution of Barbados, Section 19, protects the right to freedom of religion and worship and guarantees freedom of conscience. Section 23 of the Constitution also protects the right to freedom of religion by prohibiting discrimination on several grounds, including creed. This means every person is free to hold any religious belief, change their religion, or have no religion at all. Individuals may practice their faith through worship, teaching, and observance, either privately or publicly, alone or with others.



No one can be forced to follow a religion or participate in religious activities against their will. The law also prohibits discrimination based on religious belief. Religious groups are free to establish places of worship and schools without government interference.

However, this right to religious freedom is not unlimited. It must be exercised in a way that respects the rights of others and the public interest. For example, laws that protect public safety, health, or order can place reasonable restrictions on how religious practices are carried out.

4. What is the official religion of Barbados?

Barbados does not have an official state religion. The country is considered religiously pluralistic and secular, with the Constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion and prohibiting discrimination based on religious belief. While Anglican churches remain prominent and influential, Barbados does not legally establish or enforce any religion as official, and people are free to practice any faith or none at all.

5. What can I do when my right to freedom of religion and worship is violated?

If your rights are violated, start by addressing the issue directly with the person or institution involved, such as an employer or school. If that does not resolve the matter, there may be laws specific to your situation that provide appropriate forms of redress. For example, if you are subjected to religious discrimination in the workplace, you can file a formal written complaint to the Employment Rights Tribunal under the Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act 2020-26. If there are no other adequate forms of redress, you may apply to the High Court under Section 24 of the Constitution to enforce your rights.

RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

6. Can I express my religious views in public?

Yes. In Barbados, the Constitution protects both freedom of religion and freedom of expression, which means you are generally free to share your religious views in public. This includes speaking about your beliefs, wearing religious symbols, and participating in public worship or events. However, these rights are not unlimited. Laws allow reasonable restrictions to maintain public order, safety, health, and to protect the rights of others. So, while you can express your faith openly, it must be done in a way that respects these legal boundaries

7. Can I share my beliefs or preach my beliefs to others?

Yes. Under the Constitution of Barbados, you have the right to manifest and share your religion or belief, both privately and publicly, through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. This means you can share your beliefs or preach them to others. However, this freedom is subject to reasonable restrictions to maintain public order, safety, and health, and to protect other people's rights. Disturbing lawful religious assemblies or engaging in riotous or indecent behavior during worship is prohibited under the Public Worship (Disturbance) Act. Preaching should never interfere with others' services or create disorder.

8. Can I be part of a religious entity or organization?

Yes. The Constitution of Barbados guarantees your right to freedom of association and freedom of conscience, which includes joining or forming a religious entity or organization.



You may participate in the activities, worship, and governance of such an entity without interference, as long as it operates lawfully. These rights are subject to reasonable limits for public safety, health, and order, but generally, you are free to belong to any religious organization you choose.

9. What are the government authorities that regulate religious entities?

In Barbados, there is no single government authority dedicated to regulating religious entities, because the law does not require churches or religious groups to register for recognition. Religious organizations are generally free to operate, establish places of worship, and run private schools without prior government approval.

However, in carrying out certain activities, a religious entity will need to observe laws applicable to those activities. For example, if a religious entity seeks legal incorporation as a charity or non-profit company, it will interact with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office (CAIPO) to facilitate registration under the Charities Act (Cap. 243) or the Companies Act. Additionally, for tax-related matters, such as duty-free concessions or exemptions, the Barbados Revenue Authority (BRA) will naturally be involved. Government agencies like the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs may interact with religious groups on issues such as schooling, immigration for clergy, or public policy, but they do not regulate religious doctrine or worship. Interactions with government agencies may be necessary because, despite being unregulated, religious entities are still required to observe general laws and regulations.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORKPLACE

10. What influence does freedom of religion have in the relationship between an employer and an employee?

Freedom of religion means employers cannot discriminate against employees because of their faith. Hiring, promotions, and workplace policies must treat all employees fairly, regardless of belief.

11. What is the relationship between religious freedom and working hours?

Under the Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act, 2020-26, employers are obligated to make adjustments upon the reasonable request of an employee, if failure to make such adjustments would constitute unlawful discrimination. One such adjustment could be the alteration of work hours. Relatedly, employees may request leave or schedule appointments for religious observances.

12. Can I wear religious clothing to work or refuse to wear part of a uniform because of my religious beliefs?

Yes. Employees can wear religious clothing at work or modify a uniform to accommodate religious wear. However, important limitations apply. First, an employee may be required to remove religious wear in order to verify his or her identity. Second, religious wear may be discouraged or prohibited in order to ensure adequate and safe performance of tasks and adequate response to emergencies on the job. Third, religious wear may be discouraged or prohibited to enforce standards of appearance or dress reasonably required for the job.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SCHOOLS

13. Can there be religion classes in public schools?

Yes. Public schools in Barbados may include Religious Studies as part of the curriculum. These classes focus on moral values, ethics, and the country's Christian heritage, while encouraging respect for different beliefs. Instruction is designed to be educational rather than coercive, and parents may request exemptions for their children if they prefer.

14. Is it mandatory for students to attend religious education or religious observances in their schools?

No. While Religious Studies may be part of the public-school curriculum and schools may hold religious observances, attendance is not compulsory. Parents can request that their children be excused from these classes or activities for reasons of conscience or faith. Schools generally respect these requests to uphold constitutional rights to freedom of religion.

15. Can students refrain from attending school or scheduled school activities because of their religious beliefs?

Yes. While school attendance is generally compulsory, Barbados law allows reasonable accommodations for religious observances. Parents can request that their child be excused from school or certain activities for religious reasons. These requests should be made in advance and in writing to the school administration.

16. Can students modify school uniforms because of their religious beliefs?

Yes. While schools require uniforms, students are allowed reasonable modifications for religious reasons. Common accommodations include head coverings or modest adjustments to clothing, provided they do not compromise safety or school discipline. Parents should make requests in writing and discuss them with school administrators. These accommodations reflect the constitutional right to freedom of conscience.

MILITARY AND PUBLIC SERVICE

17. Is there mandatory military or public service, and if so, are there any religious exemptions?

There is no mandatory military service in Barbados.

RELIGION AND JUSTICE

18. Can I refrain from taking an oath in legal proceedings because of my religious beliefs?

Yes. Under the Constitution, no person can be compelled to take any oath which is contrary to that person's religion. An affirmation can be made instead. An affirmation is a formal, non-religious declaration that carries the same legal weight as an oath. This ensures that individuals can participate in legal proceedings without compromising their beliefs while still affirming their commitment to truthfulness.

19. Can judges make decisions based on their religious beliefs?

No. Judges must decide cases based on the law and the evidence presented, not on personal religious convictions.



The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion but also requires judicial impartiality to ensure fairness for all parties. This separation protects the integrity of the courts and upholds the rule of law.

20. Is there any protection for statements made in confidence to religious leaders?

There are some protections under the Evidence Act, Cap. 121. However, the Court will have to weigh the damaging consequences of disclosure of confidential statements against the desirability of admitting those confidential statements into evidence.



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