

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) is an island in the Lesser Antilles Island arc. The territory of the island consists of the main island of Saint Vincent and the two-thirds of the Grenadines, which are a chain of smaller islands.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
			<u>'Blasphemy' is outlawed or criticism of religion is restricted and punishable with a prison sentence</u>
<u>There is a nominal state church with few privileges or progress is being made toward disestablishment</u> <u>Official symbolic deference to religion</u> <u>Anomalous discrimination by local or provincial authorities, or overseas territories</u>	<u>State-funded schools offer religious or ideological instruction with no secular or humanist alternative, but it is optional</u>		<u>Some concerns about political or media freedoms, not specific to the non-religious</u> <u>Concerns that secular or religious authorities interfere in specifically religious freedoms</u>
		<u>No religious tribunals of concern, secular groups operate freely, individuals are not persecuted by the state</u>	

Legend

Constitution and government

The constitution and other laws protect the rights to religious freedom, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association. There is no state religion, but the preamble states that people of SVG "have affirmed that the Nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man".

http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_protect/—protrav/—ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_132645.pdf >

Education and children's rights

According to the SVG Education Bill 2005 "religious education must be a part of the curriculum of every public or assisted private school at the primary, all- age secondary level." But it is not a condition of admission that the student participates in religious education or attends or abstains from attending any place of religious instruction.

Family, community and society

According to the 2001 census, 81.5% of the population are Christians, 6.7% have another religion and 8.8% are considered as non-religious and 1.5% did not state a religion. Anglicanism is the largest Christian religion with 17.8% of religious people and Pentecostals are the second-largest with 17.6% of population. The percentage distribution of other religious groups is the following: Methodists (11 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (10 percent), Baptists (10 percent), and Roman Catholics (7 percent). There is a small number of non-religious groups which are Rastafarians, Hindus and Muslims.

Rastafarians have complained of discrimination in hiring and in schools, claiming that “elements of their religion, such as wearing dreadlocks and smoking marijuana, presented serious barriers to their ability to find employment and achieve professional status in the official economy”.

<kaieteurnewsonline.com/2013/05/28/caribbean-countries-discriminate-against-rastafarians-muslims-report/>

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

Blasphemy laws

There are several articles in the Criminal Code which do, or in some cases might, constitute anti-blasphemy provisions.

<oas.org/juridico/english/mesicic3_svg_criminal.pdf>

The clearest such provision is article 289 which *inter alia* criminalizes “blasphemous” or “profane” speech “in any public place” and is punishable with a three-month prison term:

*“289. Any person who uses any abusive, blasphemous, indecent, insulting, profane or threatening language—
(a) in any public place;
(b) in any place to the annoyance of the public; or
(c) in any circumstances likely to cause a breach of the peace,
is guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for three months.”*

Article 279 considers publications that may be privileged with respect to defamation (i.e. exempt from the charge of defamation, for example because the defendant successfully pleaded that their claim was true, or was an expression of opinion ‘in good faith’). However, 279 (a) precludes “blasphemous” matter from such considerations, saying: “if the court prohibits the publication of anything said, done or shown before it, on the grounds that it is seditious, immoral or blasphemous, the publication thereof shall not be privileged”.

Three consecutive articles under the heading “Offences relating to religion” further criminalize various acts on the basis of hurting religious feelings or offending specifically religious persons, with no equivalent redress for non-religious persons.

Article 117 criminalizes destructive acts intended to “insult” religion, with a prison term up to five years. Article 117 is limited to a physical act which “destroys, damages or defiles” places of worship or objects, therefore a ‘blasphemous’ expression alone should not fall under this article; however it is limited in its application only to specifically religious places, objects and persons who feel ‘insulted’, with physical offences against the places or property associated with non-religious worldviews not receiving similar treatment.

Article 118 (1) criminalizes “Any person who causes disturbance to any assembly lawfully engaged in the performance of religious worship or ceremony... liable to imprisonment for two years.” Article 118 (2) increases the punishment to five years if the person was asked to stop and refused. The very broad term “disturbance” and the restriction of the article to specifically religious places and ceremonies indicates that, for example, an otherwise legitimate protest against a religious practice or leader might fall foul of this article.

Article 119 is even broader, in that it restricts essentially any form of expression where it is found that the accused had “intended” to upset “religious feeling”, and is again punishable in principle with a prison term:

“Any person who with the intention of wounding the religious feeling of any other person, writes any word, or utters any word or makes any gesture or sound in the sight or hearing of any other person, or places any object in the sight of any other person, is guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for two years.”

According to a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, these laws have not been enforced, though they remain on statute.

<uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Blasphemy%20Laws%20Report.pdf>