

Rasta Church

A Rastafarian church in Jamaica is continuing its 14-year fight for legal recognition by the country's lawmakers.

The Church of Haile Selassie I first submitted its petition for incorporation in October 1996. But despite pleas by the church and its legal representatives, the organisation is yet to receive parliamentary approval. At issue is the Church of Haile Selassie I's use of certain herbs in its religious sacraments, which it says has been misinterpreted by some as promoting the use of marijuana during worship. Misconceptions The Church's spokesman Abuna Foxe said that misconceptions about the use of herbs during worship have contributed to the delay in being granted legal status. "For the average Jamaican a chalice is a ganja pipe, that's wrong. A chalice is a sensor that's used to burn frankincense and myrrh," Mr Foxe said. He also said that at no time will his organisation ask parliament to legalise the use of 'herbs'. The Church of Haile Selassie met with lawmakers last December where it stressed the use of the herb cassias, but not marijuana, in its rituals. Review Their request has been reviewed by the parliament's joint select committee. The Committee Chairman Senator Hyacinth Bennett told members there was a need to clarify the concept of the word 'herb'. But Opposition Senator Mark Golding told BBC Caribbean the church had made it clear it did not use marijuana and too much emphasis was being put on the legislation that aimed to define the organisation's sacrament. "The concern of some of the members of the committee is that they don't want, by passing the bill, to appear to be condoning the use of ganja," Mr Golding said. "Every time the committee sits, the issue of whether they use herb or not, and what herb means in their liturgy has come up. "But I think that after (the) sitting the members present were minded to accept that there's really no basis for the committee to use that as a basis for denying the church the desired recommendation that their petition be allowed." If approved the Church of Haile Selassie I would have the legal rights to property ownership, open schools as well as tax benefits.

BBC Caribbean