

SOUTH AFRICA

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were reports of cases involving verbal abuse, hate mail, and distribution of anti-Semitic literature in parts of the country.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The latest government census (2001) estimated 80 percent of the population is Christian. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional African beliefs together constitute slightly less than 5 percent of the population.

Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated it adhered to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation. Many combine Christian and indigenous religious practices.

African Independent Churches (AICs) constitute the largest grouping of Christian churches. Among the AICs are the Zion Christian Church (which accounts for approximately 11 percent of the population), the Apostolic church (approximately 10 percent of the population), and a number of pentecostal/charismatic groups founded as breakaways from various missionary churches.

Other Christian groups include a variety of Protestant denominations (Methodist, Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, and Presbyterian), the Roman Catholic Church, and Greek Orthodox, Scientology, and Seventh-day Adventist churches.

According to the 2001 census, followers of religions that are indigenous to the country constitute less than 0.5 percent of the population. It is likely, however,

that some of the 15 percent of the population who claimed no religious affiliation in the 2001 census adhere to unaffiliated indigenous religions.

According to government estimates, there are approximately 1,275,000 ethnic Indian/Asian South Africans, accounting for 2.5% of the total population of the country. Roughly half of the ethnic Indian population practice Hinduism, and the majority of them reside in KwaZulu-Natal. The small Muslim community includes Cape Malays of Malayan-Indonesian descent and individuals of Indian or Pakistani origin.

There also is a significant population of Somali nationals and refugees. According to recent statistics from the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, the number of Somalis in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo provinces totals approximately 70,000. While Somalis have in the past been an at-risk population for xenophobic attacks, there was no indication of any anti-Muslim or religious component to these incidents.

The Jewish community is estimated at 75,000 to 80,000 people and concentrated in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The bill of rights prohibits the government from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against any individual based on religion; it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right to practice their religion nor to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that community. Cases of discrimination against persons on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court, but there were no such cases during the year.

The constitution does not favor any religion. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of religious beliefs.

The 2000 Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act prohibits unfair discrimination on grounds of religion.

The government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered. Religious groups can qualify as public benefit organizations, which are exempt from paying income tax.

The government allows, but does not require, religious education in public schools; however, the advocacy of tenets of a particular religion is not permitted in public schools. The government makes special accommodations for individual religious groups' holy days in the scheduling of national examinations.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Prisoners and detainees had reasonable access to visitors and were permitted religious observances. There were no reports of abuse of the right to free religious practice by prisoners or detainees.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

There were no reports of serious attacks on Jewish persons or property, and the Jewish Council of Deputies nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported a 40 percent drop in the number of anti-Semitic attacks as compared to the previous year. There were, however, reports of verbal abuse, hate mail, and distribution of anti-Semitic literature in parts of the country.

There were reports that persons accused of witchcraft were attacked, driven from their villages, and in some cases murdered, particularly in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, and Eastern Cape provinces. Incidents of suspected witchcraft sometimes resulted in assault, forced exile, and killings, particularly of elderly women. Traditional leaders generally cooperated with government educational programs and reported threats against persons suspected of witchcraft.

On March 21, a group stoned two women to death. Cynthia Lemaho (26) and Mupala Motopela (81) were stoned after they were accused of practicing witchcraft

in Limpopo. The group dragged the two women from their home, stoned them, and dragged their bodies back into the house, which was then burned. The police responded swiftly and arrested 32 suspects, who appeared in the Naphuno Magistrate's Court on March 25. Two suspects were charged with murder and arson.

There are many ecumenical and interdenominational organizations among the various churches. The largest is the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which represents the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), the Roman Catholic Church, various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, and the Congregational Church, among others. The major indigenous religious groups, most of the Afrikaans-language churches, and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not members of the SACC, and most have their own coordinating and liaison bodies.

The NGO National Religious Leaders' Forum represents the country's seven main religious communities (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, African traditionalist, Buddhist, and Baha'i). The forum, in cooperation with the government, aims to leverage its grassroots networks to undertake social welfare initiatives such as poverty alleviation and combating HIV/AIDS. The National Interfaith Leaders Council, inclusive of all religions, was established in 2009 to partner with the government to tackle issues such as early childhood development and municipal service delivery problems with electricity, roads, and water. The National Religious Association for Social Development, established in 1997, also aims to strengthen the capacity and programming of religious organizations and networks working on community development projects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. consulate general in Cape Town continued its support for the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative, which brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Bahais, Buddhists, and African traditionalists.