



## South Africa

### International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Department of Education adopted the Religion in Education Policy in September 2003. This policy sets out guidelines for how religious education, religious instruction, and religious observances can be addressed in public and private schools.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 470,463 square miles, and its population is approximately 44.8 million. According to figures on religious demography from the 2001 census, approximately 80 percent of the population belongs to the Christian faith. Approximately 4 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to other religions, which include Hinduism (1.2 percent), Islam (1.5 percent), Judaism (0.2 percent), and African Traditional beliefs (0.3 percent). Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to no particular religion or refused to indicate its affiliation.

The African Independent Churches are the largest group of Christian churches. There are 4,000 or more African Independent Churches, with a total membership of more than 10 million. Although these churches originally were founded as breakaways from various mission churches (the so-called Ethiopian churches), the African Independent Churches consist mostly of Zionist or Apostolic churches and also include some Pentecostal branches. The Zion Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attract persons from rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches include the Dutch Reformed family of churches, including the Nederduits Gereformeerde, Nederduits Hervormde, and Gereformeerde churches, which consist of approximately 6.7 percent of the population; and the Catholic churches, which consist of approximately 7.1 percent of the population. Protestant denominations include the Methodist Church (6.8 percent), the Anglican churches (3.8 percent), various Lutheran churches (2.5 percent), Presbyterian churches (1.9 percent), Baptist churches (1.5 percent), and the Congregational churches (1.1 percent). The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. A number of charismatic churches have been established in recent years. The subsidiary churches of the charismatic churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, are grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The Greek Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist churches also are active.

Approximately 15 percent of the total population claims no affiliation with any formal religious organization. The majority of these persons adhere to traditional indigenous religions. A common

feature of traditional indigenous religions is the importance of ancestors. Ancestors are regarded as part of the community and as indispensable links to the spirit world and the powers that control everyday affairs. Ancestors are not regarded as gods, but because they play a key part in bringing about either good or ill fortune, maintaining good relations with them is considered vital. Followers of traditional indigenous religions also believe that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of the spirits by applying elaborate procedures that are passed down by word-of-mouth. While some practitioners use herbs, others use therapeutic techniques or supernatural powers. Some practitioners are considered masters of "black magic" and engender fear. Many persons combine Christian and traditional indigenous religious practices.

According to the 2001 census, approximately 87 percent of Whites are Christian and almost 1.4 percent are Jewish. Nearly half (47.3 percent) of Indians are Hindus, and the remaining 49 percent is either Muslim (24.6 percent) or Christian (24.4 percent), with the remaining 3.7 percent in other categories. The majority of Muslims are Indian or belong to the multi-ethnic community in the Western Cape. Approximately 80 percent of black Africans are Christian. Approximately 87 percent of Coloreds are Christian, while 7.4 percent are Muslim. Regarding the lack of religious affiliation, 17.5 percent of black Africans and 8.8 percent of Whites claim no affiliation.

A number of Christian organizations, including the Salvation Army, Promise Keepers, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), operate in the country doing missionary work, giving aid, and providing training. The Muslim World League also is active in the country, as is the Zionist International Federation.

## **Section II. Status of Religious Freedom**

### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Bill of Rights prohibits the Government from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against anyone on the basis of religion, and it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right to practice their religion and to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that community. Cases of discrimination against a person on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court.

While Christianity is the dominant religion in the country, the law recognizes no state religion. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian denominations, Islam, and Judaism.

The Department of Education launched the Religion in Education Policy in September 2003. The policy defines "religion education" as a curricular program with clear and age-appropriate educational aims and objectives for teaching and learning about religion and religious diversity in the country and throughout the world. "Religious instruction" in this policy is understood to include teaching the tenets of a specific faith to advocate that faith. The policy contends that religious instruction is primarily the responsibility of the home, the family, and the religious community. The policy also deals with the question of "religious observances," particularly within the context of school assemblies. The Constitution and the South African Schools Act provide that these three aspects of religion in education are subject to rules made by the appropriate authorities, including the provincial education departments, as long as they are made within the context of "free and voluntary association" and "on an equitable basis."

Previously, the Department of Education used a syllabus that required public schools to administer one period of religious instruction per week. There are some private religious schools in which religious instruction is required; however, many public schools have dropped religious instruction.

Only Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Good Friday, are recognized as national religious

holidays; however, members of other religious groups are allowed to celebrate their religious holidays without government interference. The National Association of School Governing Bodies has requested the Government to review all public holidays of a religious nature to ensure fairness and equity in religion. In November 2003, then-Minister of Home Affairs Mangosuthu Buthelezi appointed an interdepartmental task team to review the public holiday system. This process questioned whether religious holidays—other than Christian holidays—should also be observed nationally. The task team did not release its findings during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government allows, but does not require, teaching and learning "religion education" and "religious diversity" in public schools. The Government does not allow "religious instruction," or advocating the tenets of a particular faith, in public schools.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### *Forced Religious Conversion*

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### *Abuses by Terrorist Organizations*

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Several Muslim organizations and groups hold views and opinions that support Islamic fundamentalism, but concerns about Islamic extremism, fueled by past incidents of violence by the radical organization People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), subsided. PAGAD is an Islamic-oriented organization opposed to crime, gangsterism, and drugs, but it has been known for violent vigilantism and acts of terrorism. Today, however, PAGAD maintains a small but much less visible presence in the Cape Town Muslim community. The police have not attributed any terrorist acts to PAGAD since the November 2002 bombing of the Bishop Lavis offices of the Serious Crimes Unit in the Western Cape. No one was injured in the blast. According to the head of the Cape Town Serious Crimes Unit, the case is still under investigation. No arrests have been made, but the South African Police Service (SAPS) is still investigating a possible link with PAGAD.

Qibla, an offshoot of Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalism, avows a political, pro-Islamic jihad. It is an ally of PAGAD and has an anti-U.S., anti-Israel stance. Qibla's Shi'ite radicalism sharply contrasts with the generally conservative and apolitical Muslim community (mainly Sunni) in Cape Town. In April, Qibla demonstrated its presence in Cape Town, organizing a march of approximately 500 people to protest the killing by Israelis of Hamas leader Sheik Yassin. Other Qibla demonstrations against U.S. policy in Iraq drew a very small number of supporters.

### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There are many official and unofficial bilateral and multilateral ecumenical contacts between the churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which represents

the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, and the Congregational Church, among others. The major traditional indigenous religions, most of the Afrikaans-language churches, and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not members of the SACC and usually have their own coordinating and liaison bodies. The Roman Catholic Church's relationship with other churches is becoming more open, and it works closely with other churches on the socio-political front. For example, leaders from the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Council of Churches in Gauteng issued a statement on December 20, 2003, calling on the Government to "condemn the ongoing violation of human rights in Zimbabwe."

There were unconfirmed reports of killings linked to the continued targeting of alleged practitioners of witchcraft during the period covered by this report. Allegations of incidents of witchcraft continued, particularly in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. In one incident, the buried body of a young man was dug up in Umlazi Cemetery, KwaZulu-Natal. Various body parts were removed. Police and residents in the area believed the motive for the crime was witchcraft.

In August 2003, two young children were brutally murdered in Malamulele, outside Giyani in Limpopo. The arrested man had accused the children's parents of witchcraft.

There also were reports of killings linked to the practice of Satanism. The Government does not keep records on cases of reported witchcraft and Satanism killings. These cases are investigated and prosecuted as homicide by law enforcement officials.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. For example, the U.S. Embassy's Political Counselor met with the African National Congress' Religion Commissioner to discuss the importance of dialogue and communication between different persons in civil society, including religious groups. Representatives of the Embassy and Consulates have frequent contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country. In March, national and provincial Muslim leaders met in Mpumalanga.

The U.S. Government actively engaged with the religious community in the period covered by this report. As with the meeting in Mpumalanga, Embassy and Consulate representatives have intensified engagement with academics, journalists, and other members of civil society in the Muslim community. The Embassy and Consulates held several interfaith Iftar dinners during Ramadan and distributed copies of "Muslim Life in America" and the poster "Mosques in America." The Consulate in Durban created an "e-mail collective" for influential KwaZulu-Natal community Muslims who are willing to circulate U.S. Government-provided information, which is not carried often by the local press. They also attended the inauguration ceremony of a newly expanded Muslim school in Durban, pledged support for the school's library collection, and selected a Fulbright student from KwaZulu-Natal to go to the United States for a Ph.D. program in Islamic studies. Mindset, a non-governmental organization (NGO), received a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grant for health broadcasts on television. The NGO used the grant to sponsor an interview between an officer of the Consulate of Johannesburg and Channel Islam International.

The Consulate in Cape Town donated computers to faith-based organizations that cared for orphans and worked on HIV/AIDS prevention. The Consulate also addressed the Jewish community at a commemoration for an Israeli astronaut who died in the Columbia shuttle tragedy. Finally, the Consulate identified and selected prominent leaders of faith-based organizations for International Visitor programs.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35383.htm)