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2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: South Africa

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SOUTH AFRICA

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.

Both government policy and the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contribute to the free practice of religion.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Bill of Rights, included in the Constitution, specifically provides for and protects the freedom of religion. The Bill of Rights prohibits the State from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against anyone on the ground of religion, and it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community, to practice their religion and to form, join, and maintain religious associations. Cases of discrimination against a person on the grounds of religious freedom can be taken to the Constitutional Court.

Religious groups are not required to be licensed or registered.

Religious Demography

According to a 1996 census, approximately 77 percent of a population of more than 42 million adhere to the Christian faith. Hindus and Muslims each account for approximately 1 percent of the population, and about 0.4 percent are Jewish. There also are small numbers of followers of Buddhism and Confucianism. A sizable minority of the population, more than 15 percent, does not belong to any of the major religions, but regard themselves as followers of traditional indigenous religions or claim no specific religious affiliation.

The African Independent Churches make up the largest grouping 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 offshoots. The Zion Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church. The African Independent Churches attract persons from rural and urban areas.

The Nederduits Gereformeerde, or Dutch Reformed, family of churches consists of 3 related churches that represent almost 5 million persons. The Nederduits Gereformeerde Church is the largest of these 3 churches with a total of 1,263 congregations. Its member churches are the United Reformed Church of South Africa and the small Reformed Church in Africa, whose members are predominantly Indian. The Nederduitsch Hervormde and Gereformeerde Churches also are regarded as part of the Dutch Reformed Church family. In recent years, there has been a move away from the Dutch Reformed churches by Afrikaners to charismatic and Baptist churches.

Other established Christian churches include the Roman Catholic Church, which has grown strongly in numbers and influence in recent years and consists of approximately 8.8 percent of the population; the Methodist Church (6.8 percent); the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican, 4.4 percent); various Lutheran (2.9 percent) and Presbyterian churches (1.7 percent); and the Congregational Church (1.5 percent). Although they consist of less than 1 percent of the population, the Baptist churches represent a strong church tradition. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission with a membership of 1.5 percent of the population, the Assemblies of God (0.6 percent), and the Full Gospel Church (1.8 percent). 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.

More than 15 percent of the total population claim no affiliation with any formal religious organization. The majority of these persons adhere to traditional indigenous religions. A common feature of the traditional indigenous religions is the importance of ancestors. Also known as the "living dead," ancestors are regarded as part of the community and as indispensable links with the spirit world and the powers that control everyday affairs. Ancestors are not gods, but because they play a key part in bringing about either good or ill fortune, maintaining good relations with them is vital. Followers of traditional indigenous religions also believe that certain practitioners can manipulate the power of the spirits by applying elaborate procedures that are passed down through word-of-mouth. Some practitioners use herbs and other therapeutic techniques, as well as supernatural powers; others are masters of black magic and engender fear. As a result of close contact with Christianity, many persons find themselves in a transitional phase somewhere between traditional indigenous religions and Christianity.

Nearly two-thirds of Indians are Hindus, and the remainder is either Muslim (20 percent) or Christian (12 percent), with a small number of followers of various other religions. The Jewish population is probably not more than 100,000 persons, or 0.4 percent of the population. Of these, the majority is Orthodox Jews. There has been a slight shift towards the Muslim faith by blacks.

Churches are well attended in both rural and urban areas, and most are adequately staffed by a large number of clerics and officials.

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, 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.

Governmental Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution states that religious instruction at public schools is permitted so long as it is voluntary and religions are treated equally; however, the Department of Education still is using a syllabus that requires public schools to administer one period of religious instruction a week. The syllabus provides six options for religious instruction: Bible Education, Hindu Studies, Islamic Studies, Religious Education, Right Living, and Scripture. Many public schools have dropped religious instruction in practice. In schools that do administer religious instruction, students have the right not to attend the religious instruction, and school authorities respect this right in practice. A new syllabus has been drafted that, if implemented, would provide for voluntary, not mandatory, religious instruction in public schools. There are some private religious schools in which religious instruction is required.

Members of the group People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) complained that they were the targets of police brutality. PAGAD is an Islamic-oriented community-based organization that engaged in acts of intimidation and violence against some suspected drug dealers, gang leaders, and critics of PAGAD's violent vigilantism, including anti-PAGAD Muslim clerics, academics, and business leaders. PAGAD's earlier tactics of mass marches and drive-by shootings largely have been replaced by pipe-bomb attacks. There was no indication that police targeted PAGAD members for investigation because of their religious affiliation. Some religious communities believe that the Government is too lenient in regards to PAGAD.

PAGAD has been influenced heavily by Qibla, a radical Islamic-based political group created in 1979 to promote the establishment of an Islamic state in South Africa. Qibla is organized into cells in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, and its membership is thought to number only a few hundred. Qibla leaders dominate the Islamic Unity Convention (IUC), an umbrella body formed in 1994 that claims to represent more than 200 small Muslim organizations.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion of Minor U.S. Citizens

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

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the various religious communities generally are amicable. However, there is a concern among Christians about the perceived growing influence of Islam. Reports of violence perpetrated by PAGAD have fueled these concerns.

PAGAD portrays itself as a community organization opposed to crime, gangsterism, and drugs; however, it is known for its violent vigilantism (see Section I). PAGAD also claims to be a multifaith movement, even though the vast majority of its members are Muslim. PAGAD is most active in the Western Cape, but also has branches elsewhere in the country. Surveys indicated that some two-thirds of Muslims supported PAGAD soon after its inception in 1995, but that figure has dropped significantly since; the vast majority of Muslims no longer support PAGAD. While PAGAD continues to lose support when it is linked to violent acts, it gains sympathy any time high-profile incidents occur that are perceived by the Muslim community to have been acts of discrimination against Muslims.

In January 1997, a mosque in Rustenberg was struck in a series of bombings that also struck a post office and general store and injured two persons. The State's case is closed and sentencing of the three persons convicted is scheduled for September 4, 2000. Two of the convicted have been released on approximately \$11,500 (Rand 80,000) bail and one on \$7,100 (Rand 50,000) pending sentencing.

In December 1998, a synagogue in Wynberg was bombed. Four suspects have been arrested and their trial was still pending as of June 30, 2000.

There were occasional reports of killings linked to the continued practice of witchcraft in some rural areas. In the Northern Province, where traditional beliefs regarding witchcraft remain strong, officials reported dozens of killings of persons suspected of witchcraft. The Government has instituted educational programs to prevent such actions.

There are many official and unofficial bilateral and multilateral ecumenical contacts between the various 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 relaxed and it works closely with other churches on the socio-political front.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy have frequent contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

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