



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

South Africa

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected 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 generally amicable relationship among religious groups 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 an area of 470,693 square miles, and its population was approximately 46.9 million. According to figures on religious demography from the 2001 census, approximately 80 percent of the population belonged to the Christian faith, and 4 percent to other religions, including Hinduism (1.2 percent), Islam (1.5 percent), Judaism (0.2 percent), and traditional African beliefs (0.3 percent). Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belonged to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation.

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

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

Approximately 15 percent of the population claimed no affiliation with any formal religious organization. It was believed that many of these persons adhered to traditional indigenous religions. Followers of traditional indigenous religions believed that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of the spirits using herbs, therapeutic techniques, or supernatural powers. Some practitioners were considered witches and engender fear. Many persons combined Christian and traditional indigenous religious practices.

According to the latest available statistics from the 2001 census, an estimated 80 percent of Black Africans, who constitute the majority of the population, were Christian. Approximately 87 percent of whites were Christian and almost 1.4 percent Jewish. Nearly half (47.3 percent) of Indians were Hindu, 49 percent were either Muslim (24.6 percent) or Christian (24.4 percent), and 3.7 percent fell into other categories. The majority of Muslims were either of Indian origin, largely located in KwaZulu-Natal, or belonged to the multiethnic community in the Western Cape.

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), operated in the country doing missionary work, giving aid, and providing training. The Muslim World League also was active, as was the Zionist International Federation.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice. The government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did 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 based on 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, the law does not recognize a state religion. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian denominations, Islam, and Judaism.

Only Christian holy days, 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. A proposed review of public holidays suggested by the former minister of home affairs did not take place.

The government allows, but does not require, "religion education" in public schools; however, "religious instruction," or the advocating of tenets of a particular faith, is not permitted in public schools.

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.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups 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 ecumenical contacts among the various churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches, 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 Catholic Church's relationship with other churches continued to become more open, and it worked closely with other churches on the socio-political front.

There were reports of killings allegedly linked to the continued targeting of purported practitioners of witchcraft, particularly in Limpopo Province. In August 2005 an elderly couple in Umlazi (KwaZulu-Natal province) suspected of practicing witchcraft were beaten, stabbed, and burned to death. Six persons were arrested and charged with murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and arson. The trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. Two men accused of the April 2005 killing of their grandmother in Ritavi, Limpopo, were convicted and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment in April 2006.

In February 2006 a mob of approximately ninety youths set alight thirty-nine houses in four villages in Limpopo, accusing the occupants of being witches. Thirteen suspected ringleaders were charged and were due to appear in court in August. In March 2006 a group of boys burned the house of a sixty-six-year-old woman accused of witchcraft. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of killings linked to the practice of Satanism. The government does not keep records on cases of reported witchcraft and satanic killings. These cases are investigated and prosecuted as homicide by law enforcement officials.

While there were occasional reports of desecration and vandalism or verbal or written abuse, no violent incidents were reported during the reporting period.

Concerns about Islamic extremism have subsided since a 2002 bombing in the Western Cape that police attributed to the People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD). PAGAD is an Islamic-oriented organization opposed to crime, gangsterism, and drugs, but it has been known for violent vigilantism and acts of terrorism. The case remained under investigation, but further progress was not likely. The police have not attributed any terrorist attacks to PAGAD since the 2002 bombing.

Qibla, which traditionally has espoused Iranian Shi'ite extremist philosophies and vowed a political Jihad, is an ally of PAGAD and has an anti-U.S. and anti-Israel stance. Qibla's Shi'ite radicalism sharply contrasts with the generally conservative and apolitical Muslim community (mainly Sunni) in Cape Town. No Qibla activities were reported in the period covered by this report.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. embassy sponsored several visitors to the United States on programs related to promoting religious tolerance. Two Fulbright scholars did Islamic Studies research in the United States. The Embassy's political counselor attended the seventh International Conference on Global Spirituality Today, held at the Muslim Rasooli Centre in Centurion. The U.S. consul general in Cape Town gave an hour-long interview to Channel Islam International, a Johannesburg-based, Islam-oriented radio service that reaches an audience of up to sixty million in Africa and the Islamic world, on the history of Islam and Muslims in the United States. The consul general hosted three iftars that targeted not only segments of Cape Town's Muslim community but also significant participation by the interfaith community. The consulate general also facilitated visiting Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes' interactions on matters of faith, tolerance, and U.S. policies with leaders of the Western Cape's Islamic community. In addition, the consul general met with a variety of local religious leaders throughout the reporting period to promote religious tolerance. The consulate general facilitated Western Cape Premier Rasool's visit with the Islamic Center during his visit to Washington, D.C. in May 2006.

Officers from the Consulate General in Durban visited the Orient Islamic Educational Institute, the largest of the seven private Islamic schools in Durban, and discussed a Fulbright Secondary Teacher Exchange program with a U.S. school. The Consulate General hosted Dr. Walter E. Fluker, Professor of Religion at Morehouse College, who addressed more than thirty leaders of various religious denominations at the Diakonia Council of Churches on "Spirituality, Ethics and Morality." Consulate General officers also met with numerous religious leaders based in Durban throughout the year, including the Anglican bishop of Natal and the Catholic cardinal and archbishop of Natal.

The Consulate General in Johannesburg sponsored an International Visitor's Program for a radio journalist with the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust. The Consulate General also hosted two digital videoconferences on Muslim/Islamic life in the United States for local students, journalists, and Muslim organizations.

Released on September 15, 2006

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)