



South Africa

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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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 by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

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 a population of 47.4 million. The 2001 religious demography census estimated that 80 percent of the population is Christian. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and adherents of traditional African beliefs constitute 4 percent of the population. Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation.

The African Independent Churches are the largest group of Christian churches. There are more than 4,000 of these churches, with a membership of more than 10 million, constituting approximately 26 percent of the total Christian population. Although these churches were founded as breakaways from 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 Zionist Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attract practitioners in both rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches include the Dutch Reformed family of churches, which comprise 6.7 percent of the population, the Roman Catholic Church, which comprises 7.1 percent, and Methodists 6.8 percent. Protestant denominations include Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. In recent years a number of charismatic churches have been established. Their subsidiary 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 are also active.

Approximately 15 percent of the population claims no affiliation with any formal religious organization. It is believed that many of these persons adhere to indigenous religions. Followers of indigenous religions believe that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of spirits using herbs, therapeutic techniques, or supernatural powers. Some practitioners are considered witches and may engender fear. Many persons combine Christian and indigenous religious practices.

Missionaries operate within the country.

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, and the Constitution is deliberately religion-neutral. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian groups, Islam, and Judaism. Many are atheists or practice no established religion.

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.

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

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered. Religious groups can qualify as Public Benefit Organizations exempt from income tax.

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.

Anti-Semitism

While there were no reported cases of violent physical abuse attributable to anti-Semitism, there were limited instances of anti-Semitic verbal assaults and vandalism of Jewish property and institutions. In December 2006 a Member of Parliament from the African National Congress (ANC) spoke at an academic conference at the University of South Africa in Pretoria during which he stated that the notoriously anti-Semitic Czarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was a reliable historical document. Another delegate to the conference expressed doubt as to whether the Holocaust was real and reiterated Iranian President Ahmadinejad's claim that the Holocaust was a "myth". Following the conference, ANC spokesman Smuts Ngonyama stated that the ANC's position was that the Nazi genocide should be "condemned with the contempt it deserves."

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There are many ecumenical and interdenominational organizations 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 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 continued to be reports of killings of purported practitioners of witchcraft. In November 2006 the killer of five persons accused of bewitching one of the killer's relatives was sentenced to five life sentences by the Pietermaritzberg High Court. In September 2006 a family of three was burned to death in Limpopo Province in an incident police identified as "witchcraft-related". The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In Eastern Cape Province, a woman died after an angry mob stoned her. She allegedly told a man she had bewitched his wife. No arrests had been made, but police stated the investigation continued.

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.

In November 2006 the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Interfaith Youth Evening at his Cape Town residence. Approximately 18 youth activists participated, representing Muslim, Catholic, Anglican, Hindu, and Jewish communities. During this event, the youth exchanged views with the Ambassador on numerous subjects, including religious tolerance, the war on terror/war in Iraq, and life in America. The Johannesburg consulate staff represented the Mission at an iftar dinner promoting religious tolerance hosted by the area's Inter-Faith Dialogue Group. Consulate staff who spoke at the event urged mutual tolerance and understanding among persons of different faiths.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Mission sponsored several South Africans to the United States on International Visitor programs related to promoting religious tolerance. The nominated individuals represented a wide range of institutions, including Channel Islam, the Roshnee Islamic Institute, Desmond Tutu Diversity Trust, and Voice Islamic Radio Station. Consulate General Johannesburg organized a roundtable meeting on "Religious Tolerance and Multi-Faith Co-existence in the United States." with representatives from Muslim organizations with one of the exchange participants.

During this reporting period, the Consul General in Durban delivered remarks at an Interfaith Prayer Service hosted by eThekweni Municipality in Durban. Consulate officials also met with a variety of religious leaders, including the Roman Catholic archbishop and bishops, the Anglican bishop, leaders of independent Christian churches, Jewish groups, and prominent Muslims in KwaZulu-Natal. The focus during these events was the promotion of religious toleration.

In September 2006 the Consul General hosted a pre-Ramadan dinner for various

Muslim contacts in the education, health, and religious sectors, which provided an opportunity for discussion about the need for greater religious toleration. Two Muslim students within the Durban consular district were nominated for Fulbright Fellowships.

The Cape Town Consulate continued its active support of the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative (CTII). The CTII brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, African Traditionalists and Adventists. In 2006, the Consulate arranged for Senator Barack Obama to participate in an interfaith discussion on reconciliation and tolerance with CTII.

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