

SOUTH AFRICA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

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

U.S. embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with numerous religious leaders and groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 48.6 million (July 2013 estimate). The 2011 census estimated the population at 51.8 million. According to 2001 census figures (the last which tracked religious affiliation), 80 percent of the population is Christian. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and adherents of traditional indigenous beliefs together constitute slightly less than 5 percent of the population. Approximately 15 percent of the population adheres to no particular religion or declines to indicate an affiliation; some of these individuals likely adhere to indigenous beliefs. Many combine Christian and indigenous religious practices. The Church of Scientology has a small following.

The African Independent Churches constitute the largest group of Christian churches, including the Zion Christian Church (approximately 11 percent of the population), the Apostolic Church (approximately 10 percent), and a number of Pentecostal and charismatic groups. Other Christian groups include Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, and members of the Greek Orthodox, Dutch Reformed, and Congregational churches.

Persons of Indian and Asian heritage account for 2.5 percent of the total population. Roughly half of the ethnic Indian population is Hindu, and the majority resides in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The Muslim community includes Cape Malays of Malayan-Indonesian descent, individuals of Indian or Pakistani descent, and some 70,000 Somali nationals and refugees.

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The Jewish community is 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 generally protect religious freedom.

The bill of rights states that the government may not discriminate directly or indirectly against any individual based on religion; in addition, no one may deny members of a religious group either the right to practice their religion or to form, join, or maintain religious associations with other members of that group. Cases of discrimination against persons on the grounds of religion may be taken to the Constitutional Court.

The government does not require religious groups to register. Religious groups may qualify as public benefit organizations, which are exempt from paying income tax.

The government allows, but does not require, religious education in public schools but prohibits advocating the tenets of a particular religion in public schools. The government accommodates religious groups' holy days in scheduling national examinations.

Government Practices

On October 10, a court sentenced the Afrikaner suspect accused of a 2012 assault on two Muslims (one of whom died of his injuries) in Magaliesburg, North West Province, to 12 years in prison. The media dubbed the accused, who mocked one of the victims for his beard, the "Muslim beard" killer.

Prisoners and detainees were permitted religious observances.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

On August 28, members of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, which opposes Israeli policies towards Palestinians, paraphrased an anti-Afrikaner

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song by substituting the anti-Semitic lyrics “awudubul' ijuda” (“shoot the Jew”) at a protest against Israeli musician Daniel Zamir's concert at the University of the Witwatersrand. The university's vice chancellor condemned the singing of the song.

On June 18, in an interview on Radio 702 conducted by host Redi Tlabi, Pan-African Youth Congress spokesperson Sello Tladi said, “Even General Adolf Hitler was much better than Nelson Mandela. He did something for the German side, purging the Jews.” The African National Congress, the ruling party, denounced Tladi's remarks.

On October 27, the Sunday Times newspaper published a cartoon of the Hindu god Ganesha holding a cricket bat and money. Several Hindu organizations complained the cartoon was disrespectful of their religion.

On October 3, religious leaders in Cape Town held an interfaith service for the sole South African victim of the Westgate mall attack in Kenya, an Anglican.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy and consulates general representatives discussed religious freedom with numerous religious leaders and groups. In January the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities and 30 young Muslims launched a South African chapter of a U.S. government-sponsored global network dedicated to fostering the next generation of innovators and leaders in Muslim youth communities. An official from the special representative's office met with leaders of the country's Muslim Students Association and the Muslim Youth Association, and delivered public remarks before Friday prayers at a mosque in Johannesburg.

On February 7, the U.S. Consul General in Cape Town participated in an interfaith meeting on poverty and community development hosted by the Jewish Board of Deputies, a nongovernmental organization. The event was attended by Anglican, Catholic, evangelical Christian, Shia, Sunni, and Orthodox Jewish faith leaders.

On February 16, the U.S. embassy Deputy Chief of Mission and Consul General attended a ceremony in Cape Town marking the registration of the International Peace College of South Africa as the country's first accredited Muslim tertiary school of study. The academy works with Islamic scholars to promote peace and reconciliation globally through the use of religious texts and interfaith partnerships.

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During Ramadan the Charge d'Affaires hosted an iftar for 25 Muslim guests and embassy representatives. The Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg Consuls General also hosted interfaith Ramadan dinners, which focused on religious tolerance.

On September 16, staff from the Consulate General in Durban participated in the annual general meeting of the KZN Inter Religious Council, which promotes interreligious cooperation.

The Ambassador and Consul General hosted a lunch on September 25, in Cape Town with leaders of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities to discuss cooperation on community reconciliation, education, crime, violence, and the role of faith communities in healing the wounds of apartheid.