

SOUTH AFRICA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

There were no reports of government actions affecting constitutional provisions for freedom of religion, belief, opinion, and practice, or prohibition of religious discrimination.

There were a record number of reported incidents of anti-Semitic language, mostly on social media sites, with the total exceeding 160. Many of these were related to the Gaza conflict during July and August. There were two incidents of damage to property at the “Open Mosque” in Cape Town, one involving suspected arson and the other damage to video surveillance equipment.

U.S. government officials discussed religious freedom with religious leaders and groups. Embassy representatives met with the Jewish Board of Deputies to discuss the rise in incidents of anti-Semitism.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 48.4 million (July 2014 estimate). The South African statistics agency, using different mortality rates, estimates the population at 53.0 million (2013 estimate) based on the 2011 census. 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. There are small numbers of Scientologists.

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.

SOUTH AFRICA

Persons of Indian or other 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. The Muslim community includes Cape Malays of Malayan-Indonesian descent, individuals of Indian or Pakistani descent, and some 70,000 Somali nationals and refugees. The Jewish community is concentrated in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and specifies freedom of expression does not extend to advocacy of hatred based on religion. It provides for freedom of religion, belief, and opinion, including the right to practice one's religion, and to form, join, and maintain religious associations. It permits legislation recognizing systems of personal and family law adhered to by persons professing a particular religion. It also allows religious observances in state or state-supported institutions provided they are voluntary and conducted on an equitable basis. Cases of discrimination against persons on the grounds of religion may be taken to the Constitutional Court. The constitution also provides for the promotion and respect of languages used for religious purposes, including, but not limited to, Arabic, Hebrew, and Sanskrit.

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, registered religious and other nonprofit groups may qualify as public benefit organizations, which allows them to open bank accounts and exempts them from paying income tax. To register, groups must submit a nonprofit organization application to the provincial social development office.

The constitution grants detained persons visitation rights with their chosen religious counselor.

Government Practices

In Cape Town, a member of the city council representing the Al-Jama-a Party, a Muslim party supported by the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), tried to close the Open Mosque in Wyberg, citing a bylaw requiring public establishments to provide adequate parking space. The MJC was the principal group objecting to the Open Mosque, which began holding services in September and allowed non-

SOUTH AFRICA

Muslims, including LGBT individuals, to attend services and also allowed women to lead prayers. The city council opposed the closure and the mosque continued to operate.

Prisoners and detainees were permitted religious observances.

The government allowed, but did not require, religious education in public schools but prohibited advocating the tenets of a particular religion. The government accommodated religious groups' holy days in scheduling national examinations.

On September 18, President Zuma met with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) to discuss ways to combat the rise in anti-Semitism in the country. His spokesperson, Mac Maharaj, emphasized the government's "abhorrence of anti-Semitism" following the meeting.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There was a significant increase from last year in anti-Semitic speech, which the law prohibited, associated with the conflict in Gaza. On July 30, the Western Cape provincial secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (a member of the ruling African National Congress' (ANC) tripartite governing alliance) released a statement saying, "The time has come to say very clearly that if a woman or child is killed in Gaza, then the Jewish Board of Deputies, who are complicit, will feel the wrath of the People of S[outh] A[frica] with the age old biblical teaching of an eye for eye."

On July 10, the ANC's deputy secretary general (a member of the party leadership but not of the government) stated that: "As we move towards the month of August and are reminded of [t]he atrocities of Nazi Germany, surely we must ask the people of Israel, has the term 'lest we forget' lost it[s] meaning... The State of Israel has turned the occupied territories of Palestine into permanent death camps."

On October 24, a member of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) placed a pig's head in the kosher section of a Woolworth's grocery store in Cape Town as part of an ongoing protest against the store's marketing of Israeli produce. That protest was tied to COSAS' objections over Israel's role in the Gaza conflict. The SAJBD took legal action against COSAS for the incident and also lodged a complaint with the South African Human Rights Commission.

SOUTH AFRICA

As of November 10, the SAJBD recorded a total of 160 incidents of anti-Semitic speech, a threefold increase over the total for all of 2013 and significantly greater than the previous record total of 102 incidents in 2009. The majority of the incidents were posted on social media sites, but included 14 face-to-face comments and 64 written threats. The SABJD filed eight cases of hate speech with the authorities. Investigations in these cases were ongoing.

On October 4, a suspected arson occurred at Cape Town's Open Mosque. The following weekend, in an unrelated incident, a car rammed the mosque's gated entry and damaged video surveillance equipment. A police investigation was ongoing. Religious leaders attributed the attacks to the mosque's policies towards women, LGBT individuals, and non-Muslims, rather than anti-Muslim motives.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy and consulates general representatives discussed religious freedom with numerous religious leaders and groups. The Ambassador met with the Jewish Board of Deputies, on March 4 and October 2, to discuss the rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric.

On February 9, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith lunch in Cape Town to discuss religious freedom.

During Ramadan, the Consul General in Cape Town hosted an interfaith iftar, citing the importance of religious freedom in opening remarks. Participants engaged in discussions on the topic throughout the event.

On October 14, the Cape Town Consul General met with the Muslim Judicial Council of Cape Town to discuss the role of Islam in South Africa as a force for peace, negotiation, and acceptance.