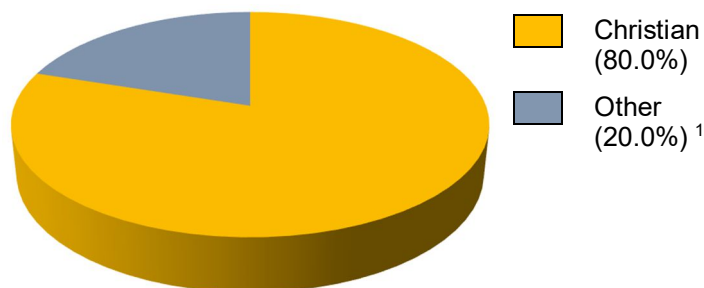


SOUTH AFRICA



Area: 1.2 million km ²	Population²: 53.7 million	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, siSwati, Tshivenda, isiNdebele ³
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Legal Framework on Freedom of Religion, and actual application

The so-called Rainbow Nation of South Africa not only comprises a vast range of different ethnic and tribal groups, but also an exceptionally broad spectrum of religions, ecclesial groups and faith communities, the majority of which describe themselves as Christian. Most of the Christian faith communities follow an African form of Protestantism, for example as members of the African Independent Churches, including the Zion Christian Church (about 11 percent of the population) and the Apostolic Church (about 10 percent of the population), along with a wide range of Pentecostal and charismatic groups, and also Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans and Presbyterians. In addition to these, the Catholic Church is present throughout South Africa, and there are various small Orthodox communities.

The Muslim community consists mainly of the long-established community of the so-called Cape Malays, together with a larger, and in recent years increasing, number of refugees from East Africa.

Religious freedom is recognised under the South African Constitution of 1996, in Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights.⁴ Paragraph 9 bans all forms of discrimination, including on religious grounds.⁵ Paragraph 15 states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion."⁶

Religious education is permitted in state schools but is not compulsory, and it must not promote the views of any one particular religion.⁷ The school calendar takes account of the religious festivals of all the major religious faiths, and Christmas and Good Friday are included among the national public holidays.

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) is the body charged with overseeing the constitutional right to religious freedom, and has the power to address alleged abuses.

Incidents

Recent years have seen an increasing number of incidents in which, to a greater or lesser extent, religious animosities have played a part. In some cases the victims were Muslims, in others Hindus and, not least, those of Jewish faith⁸. Thus, last year the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) made repeated complaints about anti-Semitic speech and behaviour in South Africa⁹. On 18th September 2014, President Jacob Zuma met with representatives of the SAJBD, to discuss ways of combating this increase in anti-Semitism in South Africa.

To cite one example, on 10th July 2014 Jessie Duarte, the African National Congress's deputy secretary general, said: "As we move towards the month of August and are reminded of the atrocities of Nazi Germany, surely we must ask the people of Israel, has the term 'lest we forget' lost its meaning...The State of Israel has turned the occupied territories of Palestine into permanent death camps."¹⁰ There are other examples of similar, inflammatory statements. Clearly, 16 years after the end of apartheid, the picture of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among the peoples, cultures and religions which South Africa likes to convey to international public opinion, is not a self-evident fact but rather a constant challenge.

Likewise an increasing challenge is the pastoral care of the growing number of immigrants in South Africa from other African countries, who have fled war, oppression and poverty in their own countries. Many of them live in sub-human conditions in the city slums. Most are from South Africa's crisis-ridden northern neighbour, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique, as well as the politically unstable regions of Central and Eastern Africa, above all Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda.¹¹ Given its relative wealth and political stability, South Africa has long been, and continues to be, a magnet, drawing people in from the poorer, crisis-ridden regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

For Catholics in South Africa a moment of celebration came in the autumn of 2015, with the first ever beatification of a South African citizen. On 14th September 2015 Cardinal Angelo Amato, the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints, formally proclaimed the beatification of Benedict Daswa in Tshitani, near the town of Thohoyandou in the Limpopo province. A school principal, catechist and father of a family, he was killed for his opposition to witchcraft, and died on 2nd February 1990, the day the release of Nelson Mandela was announced.¹²

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Apart from the apparent increase in anti-Semitic statements (for the most part linked to the Israeli actions in Gaza), there is little reason to assume there is any substantial change to the current situation regarding religious freedom. There is, however, potential for conflict arising from the increased immigration from crisis regions elsewhere in Africa. South Africa is also facing increased poverty, and experience has shown that material poverty can often be one of the major driving forces behind religious tensions, up to and including acts of extreme violence.

¹ 2001 census; U.S. State Department 2016: International Religious Freedom Report for 2014

² CIA 2016: The World Factbook, estimate, July 2015

³ IsiZulu (official) 22.7%, IsiXhosa (official) 16%, Afrikaans (official) 13.5%, English (official) 9.6%, Sepedi (official) 9.1%, Setswana (official) 8%, Sesotho (official) 7.6%, Xitsonga (official) 4.5%, siSwati (official) 2.5%, Tshivenda (official) 2.4%, isiNdebele (official) 2.1%, sign languages: 0.5%, other languages: 1.5% CIA 2016: The World Factbook

⁴ <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights>

⁵ <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights#9>

⁶ <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights#15>

⁷ U.S. State Department 2016: International Religious Freedom Report for 2014

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <http://www.jewishsa.co.za/category/media/press-releases> sowie <http://www.jewishsa.co.za/what-we-do/antisemitism/>

¹⁰ U.S. State Department 2016: International Religious Freedom Report for 2014

¹¹ UNHCR 2016

¹² http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/16/der_erste_selige_s%C3%BCdafrikas/1171744