



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **82.2%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **6.9%**
- Agnostics : **5.4%**
- Hindus : **2.4%**
- Muslims : **1.7%**
- Others : **1.4%**

54,979,000

1,221,037 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 9 of the South African constitution of 1996 (as amended) prohibits any form of discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of religion.^[1] Under article 15: “[E]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.”^[2] Under article 31, members of particular religious communities have the right to practise their religion and to form or join religious associations.^[3]

Religious instruction is an approved but not compulsory subject in public schools and must not represent the views of any single religion.^[4] The school calendar takes the church holidays of the main religious communities into account. Christmas and Good Friday are among the holidays observed nationwide.

The South African Human Rights Commission is the entity in charge of monitoring the handling of constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. The commission, together with the courts, is responsible for the prosecution of suspected violations.^[5]

Religious communities are not required by law to register with the authorities, but communities that do so may benefit from tax relief.^[6]

Incidents

The first report of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistics Communities (CRL) was published in July 2016. The report complained that religious issues and questions were exposed to increasing commercialisation in South Africa. The report speaks of illegal and unethical advertising of religious and

traditional healing services and an abuse of people's belief systems.^[7] Religion and belief systems in Africa are threatened not only by violent extremists, but also by the spread of phenomena associated with modern forms of life.

There is a relatively high number of attacks against people of Jewish faith in South Africa, even though the number has declined since the previous reporting period.^[8] The South African Jewish Board of Deputies registered 38 anti-Semitic incidents from January through November 2016 alone.^[9] The incidents included intimidation, verbal attacks, as well as anti-Semitic graffiti on public buildings. Among other things, a call to "Kill a Jew" was sprayed on buildings of the University of the Witwatersrand.^[10] It is presumed that this was linked to demands to release the known anti-Semite Mcebo Dlamini from prison.^[11] Dlamini was incarcerated pending trial for several criminal offences. He attracted notice during the previous reporting period for anti-Semitic statements on the radio and online social media.

There were also anti-Muslim attacks in South Africa during the reporting period. In September 2016, vandals wrote anti-Muslim messages on the walls of houses in the Eersterust residential district in the municipality of Tshwane. The district has a mosque and a large Muslim community.

In April 2016, 3,000 of a total of 10,000 residents of Valhalla, near Pretoria, protested against the planned construction of a mosque.^[12] According to media reports, some demonstrators threatened to slaughter pigs on the planned construction site. Others claimed the mosque, if actually built, would become a breeding ground for terrorists. Some demonstrators carried signs reading "Paris, Brussels, Valhalla??? NO!" or "Geen ISIS in Valhalla" (Afrikaans for "No Islamic State in Valhalla").

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is little reason to expect any substantial shift in the current situation with regard to freedom of religion in South Africa. However, growing immigration from areas of crisis elsewhere in Africa, which includes Islamic countries such as Somalia, brings a potential for conflict. Moreover, poverty in South Africa is increasing, and experience shows that a significant level of poverty is often one of the greatest driving forces for religious tensions.

According to the Catholic Church, xenophobic sentiment towards migrants from other parts of Africa already exists among large segments of the South African population.^[13] The economic situation is difficult for many people generally – native-born South Africans and non-citizens alike – and migrants are often viewed as a cause of general impoverishment. The Church made reflection on racism and xenophobia the centre of its Lenten campaign in 2018. It did this against the backdrop of its many previous activities in support of migrants in South Africa.

The consequences of the change in government in South Africa in 2018 remain to be seen. The Catholic Bishops welcomed the resignation of former President Jacob Zuma.^[14] They want to do everything in their power to support the new government of President Cyril Ramaphosa.^[15] "We are at a moment in the history of our nation when the people, through their determination, have started to turn the country around", said the newly elected President in his State of the Nation Address in Parliament. This marks the first time since 1994 that a president has spoken of a change in direction for the country. The Catholic Bishops' Conference observed in a position statement: "We are particularly happy with the emphasis on Unity, Ethical Leadership, and the total equality of all citizens; the intention to reduce poverty and youth unemployment, improve education access for the children of the poor; concentrated effort on greater employment will certainly bring hope to all South Africans."^[16]

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Constitution of South Africa of 1996 (version of 2012),

https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/South_Africa_2012?lang=en#18 , (accessed on 3rd March 2018).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom – South Africa, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> , (accessed on 4th April 2018).

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] US Department of State 2018: Religious Freedom Report 2016.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] 'Valhalla mosque fury simmers', The Daily Vox, 25th April 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/valhalla-mosque-fury-simmers-2014117> (accessed 29th May 2018)

[13] Südafrika: Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Rassismus bedrohen die "Regenbogennation", agenzia fides, 17th February 2018, <http://fides.org/de/news/63768> , (accessed on 3rd March 2018)

[14] 'The Bishops: "President Jacob Zuma's resignation should have been presented a long time ago"', agenzia fides, 16th February 2018, http://www.fides.org/en/news/63762-AFRICA_SOUTH_AFRICA_The_Bishops_President_Jacob_Zuma_s_resignation_should_have_been_presented_a_long_time_ago (accessed on 3rd March 2018).

[15] 'The Bishops applaud the State of the Nation Address by President Ramaphosa', agenzia fides, 21st February 2018, http://www.fides.org/en/news/63790-AFRICA_SOUTH_AFRICA_The_Bishops_applaud_the_State_of_the_Nation_Address_by_President_Ramaphosa, (accessed on 3rd March 2018).

[16] Ibid.