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Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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BQ 920 – No. 25/2026

IIRF Cape Town engages in the debate on regulation of religion in South Africa

(Bonn/Cape Town, 22.04.2026) The South African branch of the International Institute for Religious Freedom opposes the proposal to regulate religion in South Africa through a legislative framework. The Cape Town based branch engaged in the regulatory debate with a submission anchored in the philosophical foundations of freedom of association and religion.

Following highly mediated cases of abuse within religious communities, the South African Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) since 2015 pursues state facilitated regulation of religious organisations and practitioners as a purported remedy shortcomings observed. After a five year lull, these plans have been recast as “self-regulation” by said Commission since early 2025, while pursuing a legislated framework to be enacted by parliament. Based on an earlier report of the CRL, pentecostal and charismatic churches are framed as a national security threat in the South African National Security Strategy published in 2025.

To pursue the regulation agenda, an intermediary ad-hoc committee of Christian leaders has been created, that is to nationally consult Christian communities in all nine provinces from April 2026 on a “Draft Self-Regulatory Framework for the Christian Sector in the Republic of South Africa”. This framework promotes instruments such as a “code of conduct” and a “Christian Practice Council for Ethics and Accountability” awarding a “Seal of Good Standing” to participating organisations, complaints investigations, dispute resolution and sanctions, which can ultimately lead to deregistration and public notification.

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The Section 22 Ad Hoc Committee for the Christian Sector at the announcement of its initial members in October 2025 © CRL



A joint platform for the following Bonn organizations on the basis of the Evangelical Alliance:

Bonn Abrahamic Center for Global Justice, Peace and Sustainability

Business Coalition of the World Evangelical Alliance (Bonn, Hamburg) business.worlddea.org

Evangelical Missiology, Journal of missiologie – Evangelical Forum for Missions, Cultures and Religions (Evangelical Alliance in Germany) missiologie.org

Evangelical Review of Theology (New York, Bonn) theology.worlddea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology

Giving Hands – International Charity (Bonn) gebende-haende.de

Institut für Islamfragen der Deutschen, Schweizer und Österreichischen Allianz (IfI) islaminstitut.de

International Institute for Islamic Studies (IIS) (Bonn) islaminstitut.net

International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) (Bonn, Vancouver, San José – Costa Rica) iirf.global

International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF) (Bonn/Toronto) ijrf.org

International Secretariat of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) ishr.org

Islam and Christianity journal.islaminstitut.net

Martin Bucer Seminary (Munich, Zürich, Tirana, São Paulo, Helsinki, Istanbul) bucer.org

SOS World (Brussels) sosworld.be/page-daccueil

Theological Commission of the European Evangelical Alliance europeanea.org

Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft (VKW) (Culture and Science Publ.) vkwonline.com

WEA book series: Global Issues Series / World of Theology Series theology.worlddea.org/global-issues
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Yearbook Persecution and Discrimination of Christians and Yearbook Religious Freedom iirf.global/jahrbuch

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This project has led to fierce opposition and a national debate arguing over which institutional design counts as “self-regulation” when religious freedom must be maintained alongside accountability.

In this context the IIRF presents an academically reflected voice with its submission. It opposes legislated regulation of religion, religious institutions or religious practitioners. It argues:

- (1) That there needs to be full recognition and support of the authorities that define and expound religious freedom in South Africa, particularly the unique “South African Charter for Religious Rights and Freedoms”;
- (2) That the autonomy of the internal law of associations has rational foundations that merit respect;
- (3) That association-specific government regulation would be unreasonable;
- (4) That the autonomy of religious associations militates against external regulation of religion;
- (5) That the example of the commitment by the judiciary in protecting the autonomy of religious associations should be followed by public authorities; and
- (6) That a framework for the regulation of religion undermines religious freedom.

IIRF Cape Town is a multidisciplinary network of academics studying religious freedom. The statement has been drafted by a professor of constitutional law and edited by a professor of religious studies.

IIRF Cape Town has recently co-hosted the 2nd Conference on Religious Freedom in South Africa with the theme, “The Regulation of Religion and the Limits of Law” held in January 2026 at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein.

The IIRF had multiple engagements in the past with the CRL Rights Commission and South African Parliament Commission Hearings on regulation of religion. IIRF members and affiliates have published multiple scholarly articles on the matter which are referenced in the current statement.

Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** The Section 22 Ad Hoc Committee for the Christian Sector at the announcement of its initial members in October 2025 © CRL
- **Photo 2:** The logo of the CRL Rights Commission
- **Photo 3:** The cover of the Draft Framework
- **Photo 4:** The organisers of the Bloemfontein conference © IIRF
- **Photo 5:** Logo of IIRF Africa (Cape Town)

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- IIRF Africa/Cape Town: Submission in Response to Section 22 Consultation Process: <https://iirf.global/?p=7091>
- Section 22 Ad Hoc Committee for the Christian Sector: Draft Self-Regulatory Framework for the Christian Sector in the Republic of South Africa. Draft V2, December 2025: https://www.crlcommission.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Final-Draft-Christian-Sector-Self-Regulatory-Framework-in-RSA_.pdf
- Official website of the CRL Rights Commission: <https://crlcommission.org.za>
- Facebook page of the CRL Rights Commission: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100061688587753>
- Christof Sauer and Georgia du Plessis, “Safeguarding freedom of religion or belief: Assessing the recommendations of the CRL Rights Commission in light of international human rights standards.” *Alternation Special Edition [Abuse of Religion, and Gullibility of the Public in South(ern) Africa]*, Vol. 38, (2021), 378-411; republished as IIRF Reports 14 (2025) no. 23: <https://iirf.global/?p=6626>
- BQ 912 – 17/2026 “IIRF presents to South African Parliament as it listens to faith communities complaining about attempts to regulate religion”: <https://bonn-profiles.net/?p=12249>
- BQ 910 – 15/2026 “IIRF Hosts Strategic Conference on the Future of Religious Freedom Policy in South Africa”: <https://bonn-profiles.net/?p=12225>

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