

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Georgia

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Following xenophobic and religiously intolerant rhetoric by some members of the Orthodox clergy, academics and some opposition party activists who were subsequently elected, intolerance towards Georgia's Muslim minority continued in 2013. Muslims have on a number of occasions been prevented from practising their faith by Orthodox Christian communities. From late May, crowds reportedly prevented Muslims in the village of Samtatskaro from praying. In July, the human rights organization Forum 18 reported that tensions were still ongoing and highlighted the lack of an effective response from officials to the situation and similar incidents that occurred late in the previous year.

At times, discrimination against non-Christian minorities has occurred with the active involvement of the authorities. In August, a minaret was forcibly removed from a mosque in Khela in western Georgia by authorities, who claimed it lacked an import licence. The minaret was subsequently returned, although authorities did not reinstall it due to objections from Christian residents. In another incident in April, locals were abused as 'Tatars' by a number of drunk military police personnel in Adjara region and asked to prove their faith by showing their crosses. The officers were subsequently stripped of their positions and some were arrested.

Hostility towards religious minorities in Georgia has also translated into incidents of hate crime. According to data submitted by the Georgian Ministry of Justice to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for its 2013 report, 13 cases of hate crime and five prosecutions were recorded by the authorities in 2012. Despite this low number of reported cases, the US Department of State noted in its *International Religious Freedom Report* for the same year that there had been 'reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Cases reported included religious persecution, interference with the performance of religious rites, and reports of physical assault, harassment, and vandalism.'