

CRL's Push for State Control of Religion

What Every Religious Leader Needs to Know

Key Threat: State Regulation Disguised as “Peer Review”

The CRL Rights Commission is reviving its failed attempt to legislate State control over religion. Despite this being rejected by Parliament in 2018 after hearings before the COGTA PC, it is again proposing a “peer review” strategy. The plan? Use high-profile abuse cases to justify creating a State-appointed, State-funded “Council for Ethics” empowered by an Act of Parliament. This process is being driven through the Section 22 Committee, whose mandate is to **“develop a legislative framework”**.

This Committee published their [Final Draft Christian Sector Self-Regulatory Framework](#), whose aim is legislation to regulate the religious sector. Make no mistake, this is not voluntary accountability.

- “You want to open up a church... you apply first. We test you... and grant a license.” – CRL Chair, February 2025.
- “... there must be a council for the religious sector, which will then mean **there must be an Act of Parliament** and a council formed out of that Act.” – CRL Chair, April 2026.
- “It’s their peers who will say your freedom of religion starts here and ends there.” – CRL Chair, April 2026.

Why You Should Be Deeply Concerned

1. It is UNCONSTITUTIONAL

- Violates Section 15: freedom of religion and conscience.
- Violates Section 18: freedom of association (including the right not to join a state-approved body).
- Violates Section 31: right of religious communities to self-govern.
- Forces religious leaders into state-controlled “umbrella” structures.

2. It is UNNECESSARY

- South Africa already has robust laws (criminal law, child protection law, etc.) that cover all criminal abuses.
- The issue is not the absence of law — it is poor enforcement of the law.
- Religious freedom has never been a defence to excuse criminal or unlawful behaviour.

3. It is UNWORKABLE

- Who decides who qualifies as a “religious practitioner” or can register a religious organisation?
- Which doctrine will be “official”? Who sets the standard?
- How will licensing be enforced? What if you disagree with a peer review committee?

4. It is UNAFFORDABLE

- Who do you think will pay the license fees for “approved” religious organisations and religious practitioners?
- Estimated start-up and annual running costs to taxpayers of hundreds of millions.
- CRL’s current annual budget cannot cover a fraction of what this scheme would require.

The Real Danger

The CRL announced in April 2025 that “it has established a Section 22 Committee ... to undertake all the preparatory work towards the establishment of the peer review council.”

Among other things, its mandate is to consult about the development of a legislative framework - including engaging relevant State Departments - for the:

- Establishment of a Religious Practice Council;
- The registration of religious institutions and religious practitioners;
- Development of a code of conduct/ethics for all religious practitioners.

If the CRL succeeds in convincing Parliament to pass legislation to implement a system of State regulation, it will fundamentally alter the relationship between the State and the religious sector.

No religious leader or organisation will remain free from government oversight.

What Should Be Done Instead?

Religious communities should consider:

- Strengthening voluntary fraternals and networks for greater accountability.
- Voluntarily adopting the existing Religious Freedom Charter and Codes of Conduct.
- Implementing financial accountability best practices.
- Enforcing background checks for child protection.
- Encouraging learning and training in theology and practical church management
- Recommending the CRL use its existing powers to help educate and assist.
- Supporting FOR SA’s defence of religious freedom

Final Word

The CRL says, “It’s not business as usual.” But the solution is not State control of religion. History has shown that when the State regulates religion, persecution and oppression follow. If this legislation passes, your right to preach freely, serve freely, and worship freely is at stake.

“In whatever ‘self-regulatory’ terms this is couched, these regulatory bodies will be state-appointed, state-funded and state-controlled.” – Bishop Zipho Siwa

→ Stand for your freedom. Speak now. Before it is too late.

→ Write to the Section 22 Committee to express your concerns and/or to request an invitation to a meeting – S22Committee@crlcommission.org.za