

[South Africa Repeals Demands For Deportation of Iskcon Members](#)

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Apparently because of persistent pressures from a stonewall front of Hindu organizations, the South African government announced a surprising reversal of its deportation orders on 8 white American Hare Krishna devotees whose visas had expired, and said it will grant them permission to stay in South Africa to complete their major building program - the monumental 2 - million dollar temple and community center in Chatsworth.

The concentrated campaign protesting the January ruling, spearheaded by lay Hindu leaders of several groups, reached its climax at a mass meeting in Durban organized by the South Africa Hindu Maha Sabha in Durban on January 15, where over 500 gathered to chant, pray and give speeches supporting ISKCON. Having flown from his France headquarters to make an official plea to the government, Bhagawan Goswami Srila Gurudeva, an initiated Guru of the worldwide Vaishnavite organization, sat on a red velvet, flower-bedecked throne and told the gathering, "If Krishna wants us to stay, no government is going to move us. If Krishna wants us to go, no one is going to keep us." The 34-year old white American ISKCON Guru led singing and told all that he had never seen such among Indian people. Heads of several organizations shared the platform. One speaker praised the Hare Krishna movement for its role in stemming the "action of Hindus converting easily to Christianity," adding, "Now Hindus are once again becoming proud of their religion." Hare Krishna devotees had "brought about a renaissance in the Hindu community," chimed another (Sunday Tribune).

A petition drafted at the meeting by the South African Maha Sabha (SAHMS) and ISKCON called on the Department of the Interior to give official status to ISKCON as a religious body and to grant visas to their members from abroad who were replacing outgoing management and teachers. It called for a halt to the exportation in lieu of their "humanitarian work" in the country. Presented to Minister of Internal Affairs Mr. F.W. De Klerk on February 4th in Capetown by an impressive four-man delegation from Durban: J.N. Reddy (member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Committee), A. Rajbansi, Gopi Mussook and Butch Persadh (secretary of

the SAHMS), the petition yielded immediate results. Pending a final decision, the devotees were permitted to stay and continue working on the Radha Radanath Temple, which, Mr. Persadh had warned, would become a white elephant if left unfinished. The Daily News reported that a personal inspection of the temple by Director General of the Department of Internal Affairs Mr. S.S. Van Der Merwe was a turning point in the final decision.

Later, at a special press conference, Mr. Rajbansi announced the government's final verdict - to allow extension of the visas, upon re-application, until the temple project is complete, which is expectedly the spring of 1984. Mr. Rajbansi commented that the ISKCON devotees "are part of our community and we are now working with the government to map out a formula whereby future devotees, priests and religious specialists will be able to come to South Africa to do their work officially." By establishing patterns and precedents, in the long run this intelligent show of Hindu social and religious force in South Africa may well benefit not only ISKCON, but other organizations as well.