

## U.S. Diplomats Seek Clarification on Racial Eligibility in Trump Refugee Program for South Africans

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A diplomatic inquiry from the U.S. embassy in South Africa has revealed internal confusion over the racial scope of the Trump administration's refugee program for South Africans. The initiative, established by executive order in February 2025, was initially promoted as a

resettlement pathway for white Afrikaners but has prompted questions from U.S. officials about whether other racial groups may also qualify.

In a cable dated July 8, David Greene, the Chargé d’Affaires in Pretoria, asked the State Department whether individuals from South Africa’s mixed-race “coloured” community and indigenous Khoisan groups, who also speak Afrikaans, could be considered for the program. Spencer Chretien, a senior State Department official, reportedly responded that the program was “intended for white people,” suggesting a limited interpretation of the policy. However, the department later clarified that the executive order does not exclude non-white applicants, provided they face credible threats or discrimination.

The diplomatic exchange has exposed implementation challenges in a country where racial and linguistic identities often overlap. Afrikaans, once associated primarily with white Afrikaners, is now spoken by millions of non-white South Africans. Critics have raised concerns that the program, as initially presented, reinforces racial preference in U.S. immigration policy, particularly given that the South African government has strongly denied the existence of systematic persecution against white citizens.

Since the program’s launch, 88 South Africans have been resettled in the United States, with more arrivals expected in the coming months. At least one family identified as “coloured” has reportedly been accepted under the program, signaling that recent guidance may have expanded eligibility beyond its original framing.

The initiative has drawn both domestic and international criticism. Opponents argue that it reflects a racially skewed and politically driven

approach to refugee admissions, especially when contrasted with broader restrictions placed on refugee resettlement from other parts of the world. Many point to the inconsistency between the administration's broader immigration posture and the preferential treatment given to a specific ethnic group.

Supporters of the policy, including officials within the administration, maintain that it aims to assist vulnerable minorities facing targeted harm. Trump has defended the program by claiming it is based on group risk rather than race, saying that the government's concern is for those who face persecution regardless of skin color.

The embassy's request for clarification underscores ongoing concerns about how refugee criteria are being applied and interpreted. As the debate continues, the refugee policy toward South Africans remains a flashpoint in the broader discussion about race, humanitarian standards, and immigration under U.S. law.