

Beat: Miscellaneous

Young girls among 10 dead in South Africa bus crash

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USPA News - A bus carrying young girls from an annual Zulu tradition overturned Sunday on a highway in the eastern region of South Africa, killing as many as nine young girls and the driver of the bus, officials said on Monday. Around 60 others were injured.

The accident happened at around 5:45 p.m. local time on Sunday when the bus overturned at the R66 and R34 intersection in Melmoth, a small town located in eastern KwaZulu-Natal province. It caused the vehicle to slide down the road before smashing into traffic barriers, bringing it to a halt. "Paramedics and the emergency services arrived at the scene and found that the Armco barriers had pierced through the front of the bus," said Chris Botha, a spokesman for ambulance service Netcare 911. "The majority of the injured were removed from the scene by private transport before the arrival of the ambulance services." Botha initially said eight people, including six men and two women, were killed in the accident, but regional authorities later raised the death toll to ten and said the majority of the victims were young girls. Approximately 60 people were injured, including at least two people with serious injuries. The vehicle was carrying dozens of young girls as they returned from the annual Umhlanga Reed Dance ceremony, which took place at the Nyokeni Royal Palace in the town of Nongoma. The provincial health department said the deaths comprised of nine young girls and one adult, believed to be the bus driver, although other sources gave a different breakdown. "We are shocked and saddened by this tragic and horrific loss of life in this manner following a successful cultural event that promotes self-confidence among young women. Our hearts go out to His Majesty King Zwelithini, the families, relatives and the community as a whole," South African President Jacob Zuma said, referring to the king of the Zulus, which is the country's largest ethnic group. Umhlanga, perhaps best known as the Reed Dance ceremony, is an annual Zulu tradition that takes place in early September. It involves tens of thousands of young girls who travel to the king's royal palace to celebrate their pride and purity, with the aim of delaying their sexual activity until marriage. Provincial official Thembinkosi Willies Mchunu expressed his shock over the deadly bus accident, as well as a recent increase in the number of road fatalities. "The other worrying trend is that many of these accidents involve the loss of young lives," he said. "In this instance, these children had gone to participate in a cultural ceremony that promotes the well-being and dignified growth of young girls through to adult life." It was not immediately clear what caused Sunday's accident, but Mchunu said he had instructed police to investigate the cause of the crash, the state of the driver and the roadworthiness of the vehicle. A police spokesman said it had opened a case of culpable homicide, but declined to provide other details. Despite good infrastructure, roads in South Africa are considered to be among the world's most dangerous, with more than 13,000 people killed every year. Many accidents are attributed to reckless driving, speeding, drunk driving, fatigue, and the poor maintenance of buses and taxis.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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