

South Africa: US embassy warns of terror attack in Sandton

Sandton is a very wealthy suburb of Johannesburg. From [The Times of South Africa](#), and [News 24](#)

The US government has warned of a potential terror attack in the greater Sandton area this weekend. A statement was issued on Wednesday afternoon.

In a communique issued on its website, the embassy said: “The US government has received information that terrorists may be planning to conduct an attack targeting large gatherings of people at an unspecified location in the greater Sandton area of Johannesburg, South Africa, on October 29 2022. There is no further information regarding the timing, method or target of the potential attack. The US embassy has advised staff to avoid crowds of people and other large public gatherings in the greater Sandton area of Johannesburg during the weekend of 29-30 October 2022.”

A gay pride event and a two-week theatre show staged by Jewish comedian Nik Rabinowitz were potential targets of a terror attack in the heart of Sandton, [News24 can reveal](#). Peace talks between warring Ethiopian parties currently under way in Pretoria was also flagged by South Africa’s intelligence agencies as a potential target. The talks began on 24 October and will culminate on Sunday. They have also raised alarm over a similar alert issued by the US in Abuja, Nigeria.

Three independent sources – within the police and the Crime Intelligence Division – who spoke on condition of anonymity said that American authorities had warned of the looming attack and identified seven individuals believed to be part of a cell aligned to the Islamic State (ISIS). They added that

the exact target had not been identified, but that both the pride event and the comedy show were to be held near one another in Sandton.

It is understood that South African police set in motion their own surveillance and intelligence gathering operation which spanned several days and had traced their suspects. The pre-emptive travel advisory, they said, had scuppered their investigation and intelligence gathering efforts, creating discord in police ranks.

The method of the potential attack, be it using a vehicle, firearms or explosives, could not be independently verified. [South African law-enforcement](#) operatives were just weeks away from arresting at least nine Islamic State operatives...

Liberty Two Degrees, owner of the [Sandton City and Nelson Mandela Square malls](#) says it is taking an alert of a possible terror threat in the area seriously, and has put "appropriate" security measures in place. "The safety of all our shoppers, tenants, service providers and stakeholders is of paramount importance," it said in a statement. "The malls are currently trading as normal."

The organisers of the Johannesburg Pride festival, a celebration of the LGBTQI+ community set to take place in central Sandton on Saturday, said they were aware of the alert and would release a statement in due course.

Jewish comedian Nik Rabinowitz . . . declined to comment on the matter. However, News24 understands he had been rehearsing for his show, which was set to run from 1 to 12 November at the Theatre on the Square.

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) said the US Embassy's alert should be taken seriously. "[T]his is a very serious threat ... but we should remain calm and not panic,"

African security expert and senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies, Martin Ewi, said that there had been two

other recent security alerts that had been issued to US citizens by their embassy,

He said: With this latest alert, the fact that the US Embassy mentions the possible date of the attack, the weekend of 29 October, means that they do have more credible information, which I think is something that needs to be given greater thought. The warning provided a 50/50% chance that the alert could materialise.

Ewi said the growing security risk to South Africa might, among other reasons, be credited to the country's deployment of troops to neighbouring Mozambique despite the Islamic State's warning that should this happen, the terror group would attack South Africa.

"South Africa's deployed troops in Mozambique could be what is motivating the Islamic State. The attack could also be in collaboration with Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah (also known as Al Shabab Mozambique), a terror group in the northern province of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. "Whether it's the Islamic State or the latter, the former will claim responsibility because they work hand in hand," said Ewi.



He added that the target being Sandton, as per the US Embassy's communications, was not unheard of because in the past the Islamic State, in particular, had expressed interest in destabilising

affluent places in SA. Among the places that the organised

terror group had previously expressed interest in targeting were, according to Ewi, "parts of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and even Durban". "But Sandton specifically has always been a known desired target for the Islamic State."