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Responses to Information Requests

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5 March 2013

DJI104308.FE

Djibouti: Treatment of women who are single, divorced or living alone, including access to housing, employment and social services; government support services, including the possibility of obtaining financial assistance from the government in order to return to school

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. General background

The report from the Djiboutian survey on family health (Enquête djiboutienne sur la santé de la famille), carried out between 2002 and 2003 by the Statistics and Demographic Studies Directorate (Direction de la statistique et des études démographiques) of Djibouti under the Arab Family Health Program (Programme de la santé de la famille arabe), a project managed by the League of Arab States (Ligue des États arabes), stated the following:

[translation]

With regard to the heads of households, the proportion of women heads of households is relatively high in both urban and rural and nomad environments: nearly one out of four heads of households (23.4%) is a woman; and, according to the survey results, 65.6% of those women are widows, 9.8% are divorced and 8.8% are single (Djibouti and Ligue des États arabes Apr. 2004, 19, 30).

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 18 February 2013, a representative of the Djibouti Human Rights Association (Association pour le respect des droits de l'homme à Djibouti, ARDHD) stated that his organization has never heard of cases of single women living alone in Djibouti, apart from widows and prostitutes. He added that, according to [translation] "Djiboutian ethnic traditions, unmarried women live with their relatives-their parents, brothers or sisters. They would not live alone for fear of being considered prostitutes" (18 Feb. 2013). Additional information on this topic could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Traditions and stereotypes continue to shape the roles of women in Djiboutian society (UNFD Apr. 2011, 9; FIDH and LDDH [2011]; United Nations 2 Aug. 2011, para. 16). A report published in 2011 by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted [UN English version] "the persistence of adverse cultural norms, practices and traditions as well as patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men in all spheres of life" (ibid.).

2. Access to employment

The ARDHD representative stated that, although a single woman cannot live alone, she can nevertheless get a job (18 Feb. 2013). Additional information on the situation of single women in the labour market could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The 2009 census conducted by the Statistics and Demographic Studies Directorate (Direction de la statistique et des études démographiques) indicates that 70.6 percent of women were unemployed, compared with 55.5 percent of men (Djibouti 2012b, 41). The African Development Bank noted that the employment rate for women in Djibouti was approximately 12 percent in 2010 (AFDB Aug. 2011, 6).

Sources noted that Djiboutian women are underrepresented in positions of responsibility (FIDH and LDDH [2011]; Djibouti Sept. 2009, 9). According to the Djibouti Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family Welfare and Social Affairs (Promotion de la femme, du Bien-être familial et des Affaires sociales, MPF), cultural, traditional, political and economic constraints ruin women's chances of obtaining those positions (ibid.).

Sources reported that most women work in the informal sector (US 24 May 2012, 18; United Nations 21 July 2011). The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women indicated that a large number of women work for little or no wages in the informal sector and have no social protection (ibid. 2 Aug. 2011, para. 28.b). According to a report published by the MPF in 2009, with regard to [translation] "access to credit, banks are still inaccessible to women" (Djibouti Sept. 2009, 11). Additional information on this topic could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

However, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* from the United States Department of State indicated that the government of Djibouti encourages women to participate in the small business sector by providing them with greater access to microcredit (US 24 May 2012, 18). According to an assessment published in 2013 by the Union for the Presidential Majority (Union pour la majorité présidentielle, UMP), the coalition currently in power (African Elections Database 14 Apr. 2011), of the 9,780 people who have profited for microcredit programs, 6,485 are women (UMP Feb. 2013, 17). The same source stated that [translation] "approximately 3,000 small income-generating activities for women working in the informal sector" were made possible with microcredit (ibid.).

The MPF explained that, although the Djiboutian authorities have made [translation] "significant" effort to integrate Djiboutian women into the economy, improvements are needed, particularly with regard to the following:

[translation]

- Inadequacy of the credit availability conditions of microfinance institutions with regard to informal sectors where there are numerous women's activities;
- Lack of promotion and enhancement of female entrepreneurship (development of small businesses and small industries) in the management of microbusinesses;
- Lack of advice and coaching support for various credit recipients (microcredit or other credit institutions);
- Building the capacity to respond and to distribute support funds from the government or other partners by overseeing that they are used effectively;
- Increasing support for the transformation and commercialization of artisan products to make them more competitive on the national and international markets;
- Development of a structure for analyzing and guiding the recruitment of women with university degrees;
- Distribution and promotion of measures and laws of the National Investment Promotion Agency (Agence nationale pour la promotion des investissements, ANPI);
- Providing fiscal and accounting assistance to women entrepreneurs;
- Strengthening of current credit union systems (Djibouti Apr. 2009, 27-28).

In October 2012, the government of Djibouti published a decree on the creation of the National Microfinance Commission (Commission nationale de microfinance, CNMF) (Djibouti 2012a, art. 2). The main objective of that commission is to [translation] "transform microfinance into a veritable tool for fighting poverty in the Republic of Djibouti by promoting self-employment and the employment of women and youths through affordable and effective outreach credit services" (ibid.). Information on the enforcement of the provisions of the decree on the creation of the CNMF could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

3. Access to education

Information on whether women living alone can obtain financial assistance from the government in order to return to school could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to a report from UNESCO, [translation] "Djibouti is still faced with the challenge of the education of girls; nine girls for every ten boys go to primary school, below the regional average, which is already low" (United Nations [2012]). The priority, in terms of education, is given to boys, particularly because

they are considered to be the future heads of households (FIDH and LDDH [2011]; Djibouti 16 Apr. 2010, para. 204). In order to promote the education of girls, the government of Djibouti has taken various measures, including [translation] "distributing food supplies to families who educate their girls, the re-initiating school feeding, [and] building girl dormitories, especially in rural areas" (ibid., para. 184).

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Djiboutian Human Rights League (Ligue djiboutienne des droits humains, LDDH) stated that, in terms of women's rights, the Djiboutian authorities have made progress, including [translation] "the implementation in 2004 of an Action Plan for the Promotion of Education for Girls (Cadre d'action pour la promotion de l'éducation des filles, CAPEF), as well as adult literacy programs specifically targeting women" (FIDH and LDDH [2011]). In a report published in December 2009, the MPF of Djibouti noted that literacy programs are provided by both public and private organizations, two of the main ones being the MPF and the National Union of Djiboutian Women (Union nationale des femmes djiboutiennes, UNFD) (Djibouti Dec. 2009, 19). According to the government of Djibouti, between 2001 and 2009, 17,000 girls and women participated in a literacy program (ibid. 16 Apr. 2010, para. 185). According to the report from the African Development Bank, the literacy rate for women aged 15 to 49 was 47 percent in 2010 (AFDB Aug. 2011, 6).

Moreover, the report from the MPF indicated that some private organizations charge fees of 1,000 Djiboutian francs (approximately CA\$6 [XE 25 Feb. 2013]) per month for literacy courses; the report did not, however, indicate whether the MPF and the UNFD charge fees for the literacy programs they offer (Djibouti Dec. 2009, 19). Also according to the MPF, most recipients of the literacy programs are unemployed; the MPF, however, does not provide information on the number of people who have found employment at the end of the literacy program (ibid., 36). Nevertheless, with regard to the effectiveness of the literacy programs, the report from the MPF stated the following:

[translation]

Difficulties exist and can be summarized as follows. There is a lack of locations to deliver the program: literacy courses are currently offered in national education offices and buildings, which are not adapted to adults. The locations and materials already see sufficient use by children and have reached their maximum capacity, which has caused significant wear and tear to the materials and locations.

Another problem is the impossibility of adapting the availability of literate persons, in addition to the lack of financial means available for literacy programs, lack of coordinating bodies, and lack of training for the teaching staff (ibid., 9).

Other training programs are offered to women, particularly in traditionally female dominated fields (ibid., 19; United Nations 2 Aug. 2011, para. 26.c; UNFD Apr. 2011, 8). The UNFD indicated that in addition to literacy programs, it offers classes in sewing, embroidery, cooking and beauty parlour management (ibid., 7). Also, other associations offer sewing or cooking courses for women, and carpentry and masonry courses for boys (Djibouti Dec. 2009, 19). The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that the fact that the training offered to women in Djibouti is mainly limited to fields traditionally reserved for women, [UN English version] "potentially confining them to low-paid jobs" (United Nations 2 Aug. 2011, para. 26.c).

Information on whether women living alone have access to housing could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts made to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Association des femmes de Tadjourah; Association djiboutienne pour l'équilibre et la promotion de la famille;

Barreau de Djibouti; Centre d'études et de recherche de Djibouti; Djibouti – Commission des droits de l'homme de Djibouti, Direction de la statistique et des études démographiques, ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle; ministère de l'Habitat, de l'Urbanisme, de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du territoire, ministère de la Promotion de la femme et du Planning familial; Femmes solidaires; France – Centre national de la recherche scientifique; Ligue djiboutienne des droits de l'homme; Observatoire pour le respect des droits humains à Djibouti; Société immobilière de Djibouti; Solidarité féminine Djibouti; Union djiboutienne du travail; Union nationale des femmes djiboutiennes; United Nations – United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme; Université de Djibouti – Centre de recherche de l'Université de Djibouti; Université Paris Descartes – Centre population et développement.

Internet sites, including: Africa Presse.com; Afrik.com; *Les Afriques*; Afrol News; Agence djiboutienne d'information; Agence France-Presse; AllAfrica.com; Amnesty International; Association francophone des commissions nationales des droits de l'homme; Djibouti – Agence nationale de l'Emploi, de la Formation et de l'Insertion professionnelle, Banque centrale de Djibouti, ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle, ministère de l'Habitat, de l'Urbanisme, de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du territoire, présidence de la République, secrétariat d'État à la Solidarité nationale; Factiva; Femmes Africa solidarité; Femmes solidaires; Fonds communautaire d'accès au micro-crédit; Fonds monétaire international; Freedom House; Genre en action; Girls not Brides; Human Rights Watch; Islamic Development Bank; *Jeune Afrique*; *La Liberté*; Memoire Online; *Le Monde*; *Le Monde diplomatique*; *La Nation*; Organisation de la presse africaine; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; PANAPress; Population Council; Portail microfinance; Radio France internationale; Société immobilière de Djibouti; Solidarité féminine Djibouti; Solidarity for African Women's Rights; *Le Temps*; Union djiboutienne du travail; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks; International Labour Organization, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Secretary General's database on violence against women, UN Women; United States – United States Agency for International Development; Université de Sherbrooke – Perspective monde; Voice of America; La Voix de Djibouti; Women Living Under Muslim Laws; The World Bank.

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Date modified: 2016-01-05