

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

30 December 2014

DJI105048.FE

Djibouti: The situation of the Al-Akhdam [Akhdam, Achdam, Muhamasheen, Al-Muhamasheen] minority, including the treatment of its members by society and the authorities (2013-December 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

This Response replaces Response DJI105028 in order to integrate additional information provided by the President of the Djibouti Human Rights League (Ligue djiboutienne des droits humains, LDDH).

1. Origin and Geographic Distribution of the Al-Akhdam Community

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the President of the Association for Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti (Association pour le respect des droits de l'homme à Djibouti, ARDHD), an NGO located in Paris that reports on human rights violations in Djibouti, particularly by publishing information on its website (Irénées.net Mar. 2014), provided information on the Al-Akhdam minority from representatives of the ARDHD information network (ARDHD 16 Dec. 2014; *ibid.* 15 Dec. 2014a; *ibid.* 15 Dec. 2014b).

A former Djibouti armed forces officer exiled in Sweden, where he works as an interpreter for the immigration services, wrote to the President of ARDHD that [translation] "the Al-Akhdam minority [of Djibouti] is originally from Yemen" (*ibid.* 16 Dec. 2014). Similarly, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the President of LDDH [1] stated that [translation] "[t]he Al-Akhdam minority living in Djibouti is an Arab ethnic group from Yemen" (President 28 Dec. 2014). The Joshua Project, a research project that gathers information about ethnic groups around the world to support Christian missions (Joshua Project n.d.a), also states that the Al-Akhdam are Yemeni Arabs (*ibid.* n.d.b). Other sources note the presence of the Al-Akhdam minority in Yemen (IDSN 3 July 2013; UN 1 Nov. 2005).

A former member of the Djibouti Republican Guard, who now lives in Belgium and who comes from a Yemeni Arab family, wrote to the President of ARDHD that, in addition to Yemen and Djibouti, the Al-Akhdam are present [translation] "in countries on the Gulf [of Aden], in Somalia and in Ethiopia, where they are called Midgans" (ARDHD 15 Dec. 2014b). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The interpreter stated that reportedly, there are also Al-Akhdam in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, in Port Sudan, in Eritrea, and in Madagascar (*ibid.* 16 Dec. 2014). However, a third correspondent, a former activist of the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (Front pour la restauration de l'unité et de la démocratie, FRUD), a Djiboutian political party created in 1991 (*PHW* 1994, 397) [2], who took refuge in Denmark, told the President of ARDHD that the Al-Akhdam are not originally from the Arabian Peninsula but that they are instead a Somali ethnicity, that is [translation] "considered an [...] inferior tribe by the other Somali tribes" (ARDHD 15 Dec. 2014a). According to him, they speak Somali instead of Arabic (*ibid.*). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to sources, the Al-Akhdam are marginalized and discriminated against in Yemen (ibid. 16 Dec. 2014; IDSN 3 July 2013; UN 1 Nov. 2005). The Joshua Project states that, historically, the Al-Akhdam formed a "slave" class among the Yemeni Arab society (Joshua Project n.d.b). The former member of the Djiboutian Republican Guard, who comes from a Yemeni Arab family, also stated that the Al-Akhdam, who were [translation] "originally from Black Africa," were "brought to the region [of the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden] as slaves" (ARDHD 15 Dec. 2014b).

2. The Al-Akhdam Minority in Djibouti

Two of the correspondents of the President of ARDHD stated that Djibouti's Al-Akhdam all live in the region of the city of Djibouti (ibid. 15 Dec. 2014a; ibid. 16 Dec. 2014). The interpreter stated

[translation]

that [in] Djibouti, there has been a population of 1,000 to 2,000 [members of the Al-Akhdam minority] mostly grouped in Ambouli [in the outskirts of the city of Djibouti] and in district 4 (Yemen Avenue) [in the city of Djibouti] for less than 50 years (ibid.).

The former FRUD activist explained that [translation] "after France established Djibouti," the members of the Al-Akhdam minority settled in the city of Djibouti, "searching for better living conditions" (ibid. 15 Dec. 2014a).

According to the President of LDDH,

[translation]

until independence, [...] [the] Akhdam of Djibouti lived grouped in districts 1, 2 and 4 [of the city], until the day when the hostility of their neighbours pushed them to disperse.

They now live in communes, mainly in Ambouli, under the protectorate of other large majority Arab tribes, particularly the Hakmi and the Machlihi (President 28 Dec. 2014).

The President of LDDH also states that the Al-Akhdam [translation] "live exclusively in urban areas" (ibid.). He added that the Al-Akhdam

[translation]

are considered to be descendents of slaves and, therefore, they generally have inferior jobs as individuals who perform circumcisions, undertakers, butchers, party organizers, blacksmiths....

They live in extreme poverty and in precarious living conditions. [...] [T]heir situation [does not change] depending on the geographic regions of the country, because they are considered everywhere to be a community living amongst themselves and that must be marginalized (ibid.).

2.1 Treatment of the Al-Akhdam by Society and the Authorities of Djibouti

According to Freedom House, ethnic groups and minority clans are subjected to social and economic marginalization and discrimination in Djibouti (Freedom House 2014). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, published by the US Department of State, states that discrimination existed in politics and in business in 2013, depending on the membership in an ethnic minority or clan (US 27 Feb. 2014, 22).

However, Freedom House adds that Yemeni Arabs, like other minority groups, are represented in Djiboutian governance institutions (Freedom House 2014). *Country Reports 2013* also states that all the "major" clans and ethnic groups are represented in the governing coalition and that there are minority group members in senior positions (US 27 Feb. 2014, 22). However, both Freedom House and *Country Reports 2013* recognize that the majority Issas dominate the country's civil service (ibid.; Freedom House 2014).

Speaking more specifically of the Al-Akhdam, the former FRUD activist stated that,

[translation]

[a]s minorities and with no representative in either Parliament or in senior administration, the Al-Akhdam must settle for small jobs and for managing small businesses. They are often victims of extortion by the police and senior ranking officers (ARDHD 15 Dec. 2014a).

The former member of the Djiboutian Republican Guard stated that

[translation]

[in] Djibouti (and in the other countries), [the Al-Akhdam are] full citizens like all the others. However, they are often victims of discrimination, [...] for example:

- They are not entitled to marry members of other tribes.
- To other tribes, they are always considered to be servants, but this is not the case for the government.
- In general, if they commit a crime, justice will be more severe towards them and they cannot expect any leniency.
- Very few individuals from this community have been able to attend good schools and it is rare that they would be able to obtain key positions in the government (ibid. 15 Dec. 2014b).

The President of LDDH stated that the Al-Akhdam are

[translation]

[c]onsidered to be people who have "impure blood"; consequently, they cannot enter into marriage with individuals outside of their community, including members of other Arab tribes.

They are generally victims of discrimination, especially by other members of the Arab communities, because to them, they represent an inferior class because of their skin colour and their social origin.

They are condemned by their birth to live excluded and marginalized. To the authorities, the [Al-Akhdam] constitute a minority "within the Arab minority": they are victims of the same discrimination in hiring, they cannot get access to high-level positions (President 28 Dec. 2014).

The President of the LDDH added that the Al-Akhdam

[translation]

can go to the police in the case of poor treatment, but generally, they do not have confidence in the follow-up that will be given to their complaint because they are likened to "sub-human" or to "inferior persons," which limits their recourse to state institutions [...].

This barrier is real, namely when the poor treatment is linked to political opinions; in this case, membership of a minority ethnic group, and all the more in Al-Akhdam, undoubtedly constitutes an aggravating circumstance and a double sentence.

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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.

Notes

[1] Located in Djibouti, the LDDH is affiliated with the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) (FIDH n.d.)

[2] According to *Political Handbook of the World (PHW) 2014*, FRUD is "Afar-dominated" and also includes an armed component (*PHW 2014*, 397).

References

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United States (US). 27 February 2014. Department of State. "Djibouti." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220318.pdf>> [Accessed 18 Dec. 2014]

Additional Sources Consulted

Publications: *Djibouti 2013-14*, Petit futé collection.

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following organizations were unsuccessful: Association pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des libertés Djibouti; Réseau de la diaspora de Djibouti du Canada.

Internet sites, including: Africa.com; Africa Intelligence; Africa Time; Agence djiboutienne d'information; L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde; Amnesty International; Association Cultures & Progrès; Djibouti – official site of the République de Djibouti; ecoi.net; Ethnologue; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Francetv info; Human Rights Watch; *Jeune Afrique*; Minority Rights Group International; Minority Voices Newsroom; *La Nation*; Panapress; Petit futé; Radiotélévision de Djibouti; United Nations – Refworld, ReliefWeb.

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