

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

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](#).

18 January 2016

MUS105402.E

Mauritius: Treatment by society and authorities of interreligious couples, including the marriage of a Hindu man to a Muslim woman; state protection available (2014-January 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2014* cites information from a 2010 census as stating that Hindus account for approximately 48 percent of the Mauritian population and Muslims account for approximately 17 percent (US 14 Oct. 2015). The same source notes that in Mauritius, "there is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity [whereby] [c]itizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim" (ibid.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Mauritian author and linguist, who has written a book on "interculturalism" and co-founded the Foundation for Interculturality and Peace (Fondation pour l'interculturel et la paix, FIP), an organization that promotes intercultural dialogue (FIP n.d.), stated that interreligious marriages are not common in Mauritius (Author 17 Dec. 2015). Similarly, a research fellow who specializes in religious anthropology, including in Mauritius, and who is affiliated with the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS) [1], indicated that interreligious marriages are [translation] "the exception" in Mauritian society (Research Fellow 15 Dec. 2015). In contrast, according to a Professor of social anthropology at the University of Oslo, who has conducted research on ethnic relations in Mauritius for several years and is still monitoring developments within that country, "interreligious marriages are fairly common in Mauritius ... (but rarely involve Muslims)" (Professor 19 Dec. 2015).

Both the Professor and the author expressed the opinion that marriages between a Hindu man and a Muslim woman are rare (ibid.; Author 15 Dec. 2015). According to the Professor, these marriages are "uncommon" due to "historical animosities between the communities and the gender dimension" (19 Dec. 2015). The Professor explained the "gender dimension" in the following manner:

All other things being equal, a marriage between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman would be more easily accepted in the Muslim community in Mauritius, since it would then be assumed that the woman would convert to Islam. The children would also become Muslims. When the woman is Muslim and the man Hindu, the situation is less straightforward. (14 Jan. 2016)

The author indicated that differences between the two religions as well as conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in India and Pakistan are factors that discourage such marriages (15 Dec. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Treatment by Society

2.1 Treatment of Interreligious Couples by Society, Including the Marriage of a Hindu Man to a Muslim Woman

Information on the treatment of interreligious couples by Mauritian society, including Hindu men married to Muslim women, was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the author, Hindu-Muslim couples, including Hindu men who are married to Muslim women, are not considered [translation] "examples to follow" in Mauritian society and that they and their children would be [translation] "stigmatized for life" (15 Dec. 2015). The Professor specified that in most cases, Hindu-Muslim couples would experience familial hardships, "sometimes to the point of ostracism" (19 Dec. 2015). According to the Research Fellow, such a couple [translation] "would likely face extreme social and family pressure that could lead in some instances to psychological or physical violence" (16 Dec. 2015).

According to sources, Hindu men married to Muslim women would face less familial stigmatization if they belonged to the upper class (Professor 19 Dec. 2015; Author 15 Dec. 2015). The author also noted that there would be [translation] "less hurdles [to overcome] from the parents of the Muslim woman if the Hindu man agreed to convert to Islam" (ibid. 17 Dec. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Professor, a Hindu-Muslim couple could receive "threats" from Muslim extremists, should the Hindu man not convert to Islam (19 Dec. 2015). The same source indicated however that "militant Islamism is not widespread in Mauritius" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Treatment of Interreligious Couples by Authorities

Information on the treatment of interreligious couples by the Mauritian authorities, including Hindu men married to Muslim women, was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the author, such a couple would likely face [translation] "no threat" from Mauritian authorities (Author 15 Dec. 2015). Without providing further details, the same source noted however the existence of [translation] "black sheep" within Mauritian security services (ibid.). The Research Fellow indicated that in principle, a mixed religious couple would not be subjected to any kind of [translation] "official segregation, violence or discrimination" from either the Mauritian state or the Mauritian police (15 Dec. 2015). He also stated however that [translation] "the authorities who are often favourable to Hindus, could show 'understanding' towards people exerting pressure against a couple that does not conform to social norms" (Research Fellow 7 Jan. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the times constraints of this Response.

3. State Protection

Information on state protection available to interreligious couples was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The author stated that [translation] "in principle," the Mauritian police would intervene to protect an interreligious couple, should they be mistreated by a member of society but that there are always [translation] "bad apples" among them (15 Dec. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the times 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.

Note

[1] The CNRS is an interdisciplinary French public institution (CNRS 4 Dec. 2015) that employs over 11,100 researchers (ibid. July 2015).

References

Author. 17 December 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

_____. 15 December 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). 4 December 2015. "Overview." <<http://www.cnrs.fr/en/aboutCNRS/overview.htm>> [Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]

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Fondation pour l'interculturel et la paix (FIP). N.d. "Objectifs et fonctions." <<http://www.fipinterculturel.com/fonctions-4/>> [Accessed 6 Jan. 2016]

Professor of social anthropology, University of Oslo. 14 January 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Research Fellow, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). 7 January 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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United States (US). 14 October 2015. "Mauritius." *International Religious Freedom Report for 2014*. <<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238240#wrapper>> [Accessed 22 Dec. 2015]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral source: Professor of society and culture at the University of Göttingen.

Internet sites, including: *5 Plus Dimanche*; AllAfrica; Amnesty International; BBC; *La Croix*; eoi.net; *L'Express*; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Harvard University's Pluralism Project; Human Right Watch; *Le Mauricien*; *Mauritius Times*; Republic of Mauritius – Human Rights Unit of the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, Ombudman's Office, Republic of Mauritius Portal, Statistics Mauritius; United Nations – Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, Refworld; United States – Commission on International Religious Freedom; University of Mauritius; Universal Peace Federation.

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