

Tunisia

Response to Information Request Number:	TUN99001.ZNK
Date:	6 November 1998
Subject:	Tunisia: Information On The Status Of Christian Conversions In Tunisia
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Tunisia/ Religion/ Freedom Of Religion/ Religious Discrimination/ Islam/ Christianity/ Conversion

Query:

What is the status of a Tunisian who converted from Islam to Christianity?

Response:

Tunisia is primarily a Muslim country, with 98.2 percent of the people practicing Sunni Islam. Although the country is primarily Muslim, according to the National Charter of 1988, freedom of religion is guaranteed. The Christian community in Tunisia is made up mostly of Europeans. The only legal restriction on the practice of non-Muslim religions is that it is criminal to convert someone from Islam. (*Freedom of Religion and Belief*. 1997, 79).

A phone conversation with the *International Christian Connection* indicated that there is very little information on the treatment of Christians in Tunisia because Tunisia is approximately 99 percent Muslim. There are existing Christian churches, but they are few in number and are primarily attended by foreigners. The government tends to be very restrictive of the churches operating in Tunisia. Conversion to Christianity is frowned on but this is primarily a societal pressure not to convert, not from the government.

This is supported by the *DOS Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1996* which states:

The Christian community, estimated at about 2,000, is composed mainly of foreigners. It freely holds church services and operates a small number of schools. The Government views proselytizing as an act against "public order." Authorities ask foreigners suspected of proselytizing to depart the country and do not permit them to return. There were no reported cases of official action against persons suspected of proselytizing. (*U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996*).

An official from the Department of State stated that they are not aware of any religious conversions because the county is 99 percent Muslim and the other one percent are primarily foreigners. (State 21 September 1998.)

Information on the specific treatment of individuals converting to Christianity from Islam in Tunisia could not be found.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Freedom of Religion and Belief. 1997. Edited by Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen. New York: Routledge.

International Christian Connection, phone interview, September 3, 1998.

U.S. Department of State. 21 September 1998. Telephone interview.

U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996. 1997. Washington, DC. (REFWORLD).

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