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Jordan: Situation and treatment of atheists; whether someone who is born Muslim but does not practice Islam and considers himself or herself to be atheist faces discrimination or ill-treatment by state authorities or society
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to the United States (US) *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, statistics on the number of people who do not adhere to any religious faith in Jordan are not available and atheists are required to self-identify with a recognized religion "for purposes of official identification" (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 1 and 2). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a researcher on minority rights and religious issues in the Middle East, affiliated with the Faculty of Law at the University of Grenoble (10 June 2010), similarly stated that atheism is not recognized by Jordan and that individuals are required to belong to a religious community for legal purposes (Researcher 8 June 2010).

Information about the treatment of atheists in Jordan was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. In 5 June 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of international relations at the University of Southern California (USC), who has been studying the region for over thirty years, stated that she was not aware of any cases where atheists in Jordan were discriminated against. According to the Professor, being an atheist "is not something that someone would go around advertising, but it is also not something that is actively persecuted" (Professor 5 June 2010). However, the Professor noted that someone who openly and publicly proclaims atheism may face a negative reaction from society, depending on the social or familial context (ibid.).

In the opinion of the Researcher, an individual of Muslim origin may be subject to ill-treatment or discrimination by Jordanian society for publicly declaring that he or she no longer believes in Islam, or by disrespecting some religious laws (Researcher 8 June 2010).

The International Religious Freedom Report 2009 notes that Article 14 of Jordan's Constitution guarantees the freedom to practise one's religion, provided such practice adheres to the Kingdom's customs and does not "violate public order or morality"; Article 6 of the Constitution forbids discrimination based on religion (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2). The Constitution of Jordan indicates that the state religion is Islam (ibid.). The Researcher noted that someone who eats in public during Ramadan can face arrest (Researcher 10 June 2010). He stated that although the law does not specifically mention this restriction, state authorities justify intervention based on the state religion being Islam (ibid.). The

Researcher noted that only Islam and Christianity are recognized by the state (ibid.)

Two sources indicate that matters related to family law fall under the jurisdiction of courts governed by Sharia law for Muslims and under the jurisdiction of separate tribunals for members of other recognized religions (such as Christianity); there are no secular civil tribunals for atheists or those that follow unrecognized religions (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2; Researcher 8 June 2010). Sharia law considers Muslims who convert to other religions to be "apostates" who may be denied their civil rights (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2; Researcher 8 June 2010). *The International Religious Freedom Report 2009* and the Researcher note cases where Muslims who converted to Christianity in Jordan have had their marriages annulled, had property confiscated, and have been denied other civil rights (Researcher 8 June 2010; US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2). The Researcher was not aware of any cases where atheists in Jordan faced charges for renouncing their religion (Researcher 10 June 2010). The Professor noted that Islam prohibits renouncing one's religion (Professor 5 June 2010). However, she stated that instances of legal measures taken against apostates are rare (ibid.).

Several sources indicate that it is illegal to publish material that insults recognized religions (Human Rights Watch 2010; IHS Global Insight 6 Mar. 2007; *The Wall Street Journal* 10 Sept. 2008; Professor 5 June 2008). Human Rights Watch reports that Article 5 of Jordan's 2007 Press and Publications Law states that publications must comply with "Islamic values" (2010). The Professor stated that Jordanians can be prosecuted for slandering the Prophet or making other statements viewed as insulting towards Islam or Christianity, and that making such statements can also cause societal scorn (Professor 5 June 2010). In one example from October 2008, a Jordanian writer, who incorporated verses of the Koran into his poetry book, was reportedly charged with insulting Islam (AFP 21 Oct. 2008; US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2). *The International Religious Freedom Report 2009* indicates that in June 2009, the writer was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and fined 14,000 US dollars; he was out on bail and appealing the decision as of October 2009 (ibid.).

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.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Forum 18, Hudson Institute, Human Rights First, Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA), Minority Rights Group International, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld, United States (US) Commission on International Freedom.

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