

Christians

Profile

There are a number of Christians, mostly Palestinians but also some long established East Bank families, in the north-west of the country. Altogether, they constitute around six per cent of the population. Most are Greek Orthodox but there are members of most other Orthodox and Uniate churches and a community of about 60,000 Armenians. Christian services in Jordan are conducted in a variety of languages.

Historical context

The Christian Holy Land includes part of Jordan, and Christianity in the area pre-dates the arrival of Islam. Although Islam came to dominance in the region, its recognition of Christians as 'people of the book' laid a solid groundwork for peaceful co-existence. This has certainly not always been the practice, but in modern Jordan acceptance of Christianity in the midst of the Muslim majority has been the norm.

Since its founding, the Kingdom of Jordan has demonstrated tolerance for the Christian minority, even as its percentage of the population fell over the course of the 20th century due to relatively lower birth rates than those among Muslims. In the mid-1990s, Jordan introduced Christian education in state-run schools.

Current issues

The Jordanian government remains overwhelmingly tolerant of the Christian minority, which is allowed to worship publicly. However, Christians are prohibited by law from proselytizing to Muslims. The government does not recognize Christians who have converted from Islam, and for such legal purposes as property and family law, continues to consider them as Muslims.

Under the 1952 constitution, nine of 110 seats in the Chamber of Deputies are reserved for Christians, which means that Christians are over-represented in the body. Christians routinely serve as cabinet ministers, and are well represented among the senior ranks of the military. Christians' economic influence also far outweighs their numbers, since some Christians are highly influential in the country's finance sector. Christian pupils are not subjected to Islamic teachings in state-run schools, and Christian-Islamic relations in the country are mostly good.

A November 2007 Norwegian study of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, conducted together with the Jordanian government, found that 12 per cent of up to 500,000 Iraqi refugees who fled to the country since 2003 were Christian.