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09 March 2007

SYR102393.E

Syria: Treatment of homosexuals by society and government authorities; legal recourse and protection available to homosexuals who have been subject to ill-treatment (2000 - 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on the treatment of homosexuals by society and government authorities, and the legal recourse and protection available to homosexuals subject to ill-treatment, was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. The United Kingdom's (UK) *Country of Origin Information Report* on Syria attributes the lack of information on homosexual men in Syria to their legal situation, which restricts their ability to be candid about their sexuality (27 Oct. 2006, para. 19.02). A feature article in the London-based newspaper *The Guardian* reports that in Arab countries, "homosexuality tends to be viewed either as wildly perverse behaviour, or as a symptom of psychiatric disturbance, and dealt with accordingly" (13 June 2006). Additional information to that found in SYR39327 of 23 August 2002, which is provided below, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In a 2002 interview with the Research Directorate, a consular officer at the Embassy of Syria in Washington, DC said that the perception of homosexuality in the law and in society had not changed since 1993 (23 Aug. 2002). According to the consular officer, acts of homosexuality are punishable by a prison term (Syria 23 Aug. 2002). Those individuals wishing to practice homosexuality in Syria must do so in secrecy or face possible punishment, although charges are "rarely" laid (*ibid.*).

The International Lesbian and Gay Association's (ILGA) *World Legal Survey* quotes the *Third Pink Book* of 1993, which provides a country-by-country survey of the legal situation of homosexuals (ILGA 31 July 2000b) as stating that "Section 520 of the Penal Code criminalizes any 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature' with a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment" (*ibid.* 31 July 2000a). A world survey of sexual minorities and the law appended to *The No-Nonsense Guide to Sexual Diversity* states that homosexuality is illegal in Syria and punishable by up to three years' imprisonment (2001).

No further information on the situation of homosexuals in Syria, including legal treatment, social views, organizations and support available, could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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 to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

The Guardian [London]. 13 June 2006. "People Think It's a Mental Illness." (Factiva)

International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). 31 July 2000a. "Syria." *World Legal Survey*.
<http://www.ilga.info/Information/legal_survey/middle%20east/syria.htm> [Accessed 15 August 2002]

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The No-Nonsense Guide to Sexual Diversity. 2001. Vanessa Baird. London: Verso Books. <<http://www.ai-lgbt.org/newintupdate.doc>> [Accessed 15 August 2002]

Syria. 23 August 2002. Embassy of Syria, Washington, DC. Telephone interview with a consular officer.

United Kingdom (UK). 27 October 2006. Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate. *Country of Origin Information Report: Syria*. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/syria_011106.doc> [Accessed 19 Feb. 2007]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact an expert in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights were unsuccessful. A law professor specializing in human rights and sexuality and a Syrian embassy official were unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: Al Bawaba, Al-Fatiha, Amnesty International (AI), *Arabicnews.com*, Gay and Lesbian Arab Society, GayLawNet, GlobalGayz.com, Human Rights Watch, Independent Gay Forum, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, International Lesbian and Gay Association, Islamcatalogue, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Queerjihad, Queer Muslims, Queer Resources Directory, Rainbow Association for Gay Rights, Le Séminaire Gai, Sodomy Laws, Syria Human Rights Committee, United States (US) Department of State.

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