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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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21 October 2003

**SYR42112.FE**

Syrian Arab Republic: The treatment of Jehovah Witnesses and their right to practice their religion  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

According to the report on religious freedom of the United States Department of State, the Syrian government banned Jehovah's Witnesses as a politically motivated Zionist organization in 1964 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2002* 7 Oct. 2002, Section 2). The report indicated that Jehovah's Witnesses continued to practice their faith privately despite the official ban (ibid.). However, according to the report, three Syrian Druze men suspected of becoming Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in March 2001 by Syrian intelligence officials, detained for two months, and then released "after signing papers stating that they would cease attending their church and cease contact with their pastor" (ibid.).

The report also indicated that there is no law in Syria that prohibits religious denominations from proselytizing (ibid., Section 3). The government, however, was sensitive to complaints by religious groups and intervened when it deemed that the proselytizing of other groups threatened the relations among religions (ibid.).

According to a statistical sourcebook on over 42,000 different religions, denominations, religious organizations and church groups, which may be consulted at the Adherents.com Website, there were fewer than 500 Jehovah's Witnesses in Syria in 1983 (Adherents.com n.d.).

No additional information on the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Syria and on their right to practice their religion could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for 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 to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### References

Adherents.com. n.d. "Religion by Location." <[http://www.adherents.com/adhloc/Wh\\_315.htm](http://www.adherents.com/adhloc/Wh_315.htm)> [Accessed 15 Oct. 2003]

*International Religious Freedom Report 2002*. 7 October 2002. United States Department of State. Washington, DC. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/14015.htm>> [Accessed 15 Oct. 2003]

### Additional Sources Consulted

Dialog

IRB Databases

**Internet sites, including:**

Amnesty International

European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI.net)

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Jehovah's Witnesses: Authorized Site of the Office of Public Information of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses: Watch Tower Society Official Website

World News Connection (WNC)

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