Syrian Arab Republic: Treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses by the authorities and society in general, and protection offered (2005)

According to the General Counsel for Jehovah's Witnesses, whose office is in Patterson, New York, in 1964, the Secretariat of the League of Arab Nations banned the work of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout member countries, including Syria (4 Nov. 2005; see also International Religious Freedom Report 2004 15 Sept. 2004).

The organization's most recent statistics date back to the 1970s, when there were 200 Jehovah's Witnesses in Syria (Office of Public Information of Jehovah's Witnesses 4 Nov. 2005). The International Religious Freedom Report 2004 indicates that, despite the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses, they have continued to practise their faith privately (15 Sept. 2004, Sec. 2).

According to the General Counsel, in Syria, "Jehovah's Witnesses have virtually no freedoms" (4 Nov. 2005). They are still subject to a ban and "are repeatedly and continuously called in for investigation" (Office of Public Information of Jehovah's Witnesses 4 Nov. 2005). Some Jehovah's Witnesses have been subjected to harassment and torture and have been imprisoned because of their religious affiliation (ibid.). The most recent arrest of a Jehovah's Witness in Syria was in 2000 (ibid.). Jehovah's Witnesses are prohibited from congregating for worship and their literature is likewise forbidden (ibid.). The General Counsel said that, in 2004, the home of a Jehovah's Witness was raided by police searching for religious literature (ibid.). Jehovah's Witnesses cannot be employed by the government, and, if a government employee were to become a Jehovah's Witness, he or she would be discharged (ibid.). Moreover, according to the General Counsel, records of the names of Jehovah's Witnesses are kept at the borders because they are not allowed to leave the country (ibid.). The above information could not be corroborated by the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Furthermore, although proselytizing "is not officially illegal," it is discouraged by the government, and charges are sometimes laid because the activity is seen as "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups" (International Religious Freedom Report 2004 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. 2). Proselytizing is punishable by a five-year prison sentence, yet such sentences are often reduced to one or two years (ibid.). No convictions for proselytizing were reported in the last three years (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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References
Office of Public Information of Jehovah's Witnesses. 4 November 2005. Correspondence from the General Counsel.
Counsel.


**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** The Center for Religious Freedom (Freedom House) and the Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) were unable to provide the information requested within the time constraints of this Response.

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