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Morocco: General situation of Muslims who converted to Christianity, and specifically those who converted to Catholicism; their treatment by Islamists and the authorities, including state protection (2008-2011)

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On 27 March 2010, the Moroccan magazine *TelQuel* stated that thousands of Moroccans had converted to Christianity. Pointing out the absence of official data, Service de presse Common Ground, which focuses on Muslim-Western relations (n.d.), cites unspecified sources that stated that about 5,000 Moroccans became Christians between 2005 and 2010 (22 Jan. 2010). The *International Religious Freedom Report* published by the United States Department of State indicates that, according to the estimates given by Moroccan Christian leaders, there are about 8,000 Moroccan Christians out of a population of 34.8 million (US 13 Sept. 2011, Sec. 1). However, the number of Catholics among these Moroccan Christians is unknown (Famille chrétienne.fr 19 Mar. 2010). No other information on Moroccan Christian Catholics could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Laws

According to article 3 of the Moroccan constitution of July 2011, [translation] "Islam is the state religion, which guarantees everyone the freedom of worship" (Morocco 29 July 2011). Article 220 of the Moroccan penal code states: [translation] "Anyone who, through violence or threat, restrains or prevents one or several persons from worshipping or attending worship, is punishable by imprisonment for six months to three years and by a fine of 200 to 500 dirham" (1 dirham = C\$0.12 [XE 7 Nov. 2011]) (Morocco 26 Nov. 1962). Information on whether this provision of the law has already been applied could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Treatment of Moroccan Christians by the authorities

According to an islamologist who gave an interview to a correspondent of the Casablanca daily *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*, Christians, in contrast with Jews, do not have a legal status that guarantees their rights as a minority (11 Dec. 2009). Similarly, while mentioning that voluntary conversion is not prohibited, the *International Religious Freedom Report* points out that there are no legal mechanisms "that recognize the country's Christian community (or other non-Muslims) in the same way the state recognizes its Jewish community" (US 13 Sept. 2011, Sec. 2). The report states that there is separate legislation and courts with authority over personal status matters for Jewish people, such as marriage and inheritance (*ibid.*). The European Parliament points out that, with respect to marriages and funerals, Moroccan Christians "have to observe Muslim law" (EU 27 May 2010). The *International Religious Freedom Report* states that while the constitution provides for the freedom to practice one's religion, in reality, the government places restrictions on this (US 13 Sept. 2011, Sec. 2).

Moroccans who have converted to Christianity [translation] "are not allowed to enter official churches in Morocco, which are open only to Christian foreigners" (*TelQuel* 27 Mar. 2010). Although Moroccans who have converted to Christianity are free to practice their religion, neither are these churches allowed to admit them (Famille chrétienne.fr 19 Mar. 2010). Similarly, according to the European Parliament, although religious freedom is guaranteed to Moroccans, Christians and especially Muslims who converted to Christianity face "numerous forms of discrimination" and "are not allowed to set foot in a church" (EU 27 May 2010).

According to the magazine *TelQuel*, in order to thwart these conversions to Christianity, which it considers a [translation] "threat", the government reacted [translation] "violently" and Moroccan Christians were subjected to [translation] "police harassment" (27 Mar. 2010). In addition, the *International Religious Freedom Report* pointed out that some Moroccan Christians have reported being victims of "harassment" by police officers (US 13 Sept. 2011, sect. 2). Some Moroccan Christians were avoiding meeting in large numbers for fear of police raids and investigations into their activities (*ibid.*). In February 2010, security forces raided a meeting held by 16 Moroccan Christians and one foreigner in the city of Amizmiz (*ibid.*). The authorities detained these people for 14 hours before releasing the Moroccans without laying charges and deporting the foreigner (*ibid.*). In addition, an undated report published on the Internet site of The Voice of the Martyrs, a Canadian Christian non-governmental organization (NGO) that helps "persecuted" Christians around the world (The Voice of the Martyrs n.d.b), states that Moroccan Christians are "harassed and intimidated" by police informers (*ibid.* n.d.a). A journalist from the Internet site Top Chrétien, cited in the article published by Famille chrétienne.fr, stated that the government's tougher stance could be explained by the fact [translation] "that it is concerned about the conversions to Christianity, which it considers to be on the increase" (Famille chrétienne.fr 19 Mar. 2010). The journalist added that [translation] "police raids of the Bible study meetings of Moroccans are frequent" (*ibid.*). Similarly, according to Freedom House, Moroccan authorities "are growing increasingly intolerant of social and religious diversity" and they launched arrest campaigns against , among others, Muslims who converted to Christianity (Freedom House 2011).

Treatment of Moroccan Christians by society

According to a member of the humanitarian association la Gerbe, cited by Famille chrétienne.fr, a Christian news site (Famille chrétienne.fr n.d.),

[translation]

Moroccan Christians do not have the freedom of the city in Morocco. They are considered to be traitors by the authorities and the population, who subject them to all kinds of pressure: insults, spitting ... families are even encouraged to kick out family members who are Christians (19 Mar. 2010).

Similarly, in May 2010, Compass Direct News, a press agency that publishes articles about "persecuted" Christians around the world (Compass Direct News n.d.), wrote that Moroccan Christians had complained about experiencing family and societal "pressure and discrimination" (21 May 2010). According to Compass Direct News, the majority of the Moroccan Christians who spoke to Compass said that the attitudes of their Muslim relatives had shifted and that many of them had been kicked out of their homes or had chosen to leave of their own accord "to not create problems for their families" (Compass Direct News 17 June 2010). Another Moroccan Christian said that a Muslim had taken him to court because of his "Christian activities"; the source, however, did not give details of this matter (*ibid.*). According to the magazine *TelQuel*, many Moroccans who converted to Christianity fear that they will be rejected and practice their religion only at home (27 Mar. 2010).

Compass Direct News states that some Moroccan Islamists have used Facebook to target Moroccans who have converted to Christianity (Compass Direct News 17 June 2010). Moroccan Christians accuse the Islamists of "aiding and encouraging the government to pursue them by exposing and vilifying them" on Facebook (*ibid.*). In addition, the United States Department of State indicates that over 30 images depicting Muslims who had converted to Christianity were published on Facebook, where they were described as "hyenas" and as "shaking the faith of Muslims" (US 13 Sept. 2011, sect. 3). These images "include details about their roles and activities in churches" and "their personal addresses" (Compass Direct News 17 June 2010).

Information about protection that Moroccan Christians may receive could not 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 for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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