

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca.

12 November 2013

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Lebanon: Situation of Jehovah's Witnesses, including treatment by society and authorities; state protection available in cases of discrimination or mistreatment (2006-November 2013)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Status and Rights of Jehovah's Witnesses

Media sources indicate that, as far as the Lebanese government is concerned, Jehovah's Witnesses is neither a registered organization nor an officially recognized religion (*Los Angeles Times* 17 Apr. 2010; NOW Lebanon 16 Nov. 2008). In its submission to the UN Universal Period Review (UPR), the working group of the UN Human Rights Council indicated that Jehovah's Witnesses are considered by Lebanese religious authorities as "outlawed" (Dec. 2010). In 2010, the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses (EAJCW) stated in their submission to the UPR that on 27 January 1971, the Lebanese Council of Ministers banned Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon based on the "charge that 'Jehovah's Witnesses are inspired by International Zionism'" (EAJCW 26 Mar. 2010). The EAJCW added in the same 2010 report that the 1971 ban was still in force (*ibid.*). The ban does not allow Jehovah's Witnesses "to import religious literature, publicly share their beliefs, and have Christian meetings for worship in Kingdom Halls (places of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses)" (*ibid.*). The US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that in Lebanon, "[f]ormal recognition is a legal requirement for religious groups to conduct most religious activities" (2012, 3). However, sources indicate that unrecognized religions may operate and assemble (Cumorah n.d.c; NOW Lebanon 16 Nov. 2008). Similarly, the US *International Religious Freedom Report* says that unrecognized religious groups "are permitted to perform their religious rites freely" (2012, 4).

The website of Cumorah, a "privately funded initiative that engages in research and education" with focus on Latter-day Saints Church growth worldwide (Cumorah n.d.a; *ibid.* n.d.b), reports that unrecognized religious groups may own property (n.d.c). However, NOW Lebanon, an independent and "non-sectarian" online news source that includes "members from all Lebanese political, ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups and persuasions" and which aims to promote democracy and liberalism in Lebanon (NOW Lebanon n.d.), indicates that non-recognized religious groups "cannot officially register their houses of worship," and that Kingdom Halls (places where Jehovah's Witnesses gather "to study the Bible and doctrinal literature") are registered as regular property owned by individuals rather than as houses of worship (NOW Lebanon 16 Nov. 2008). NOW Lebanon also indicates that unlike churches and mosques, unrecognized religious groups are not entitled to property tax exemptions (*ibid.*).

The Cumorah website adds that unrecognized religious groups do not benefit from "freedom of adherents to run for public office" (n.d.c). Similarly, the US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report* explains that members of unrecognized religious groups "do not qualify for certain government positions (2012, 4).

In 2008, NOW Lebanon reported that Lebanon prohibits the distribution of tracts on the street, and, according to a Jehovah's Witness interviewed by the news source, Jehovah's Witnesses "are prohibited from handing someone religious materials the first time they visit a house. If the people in that house invite them back or request some printed material, the Witnesses can distribute it" (16 Nov. 2008). According to NOW Lebanon, the "reception of [Jehovah's Witnesses'] proselytizing in Lebanon ... is mixed" (16 Nov. 2008).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that "[t]here are no procedures for civil marriage; however, the government recognizes civil marriage ceremonies performed outside the country, irrespective of the religious affiliation of each individual" (2012, 3). NOW Lebanon explains that recognized religions have their own courts that deal with family matters, including marriage and divorce; the source said that due to the absence of civil laws on marriage, Jehovah's Witnesses cannot get married in Lebanon and have to travel abroad to do so (16 Nov. 2008).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* notes that unrecognized religious group members "have no standing to determine inheritance issues" (2012, 4). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.1 Numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses and Geographical Area

In 2008, NOW Lebanon reported that there was a population of 3,613 Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon who make up 70 congregations or worship groups (16 Nov. 2008). Further information on the number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In 2008, NOW Lebanon reported that there were 15 Kingdom Halls in Lebanon (16 Nov. 2008). In 2010, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the number of Kingdom Halls in Lebanon was estimated at over 15 (17 Apr. 2010).

NOW Lebanon reports that according to an expert on Christianity in Lebanon, many Jehovah's Witnesses were "concentrated in the town of Qalamoun, south of Tripoli, and in the caza of Akkar" (16 Nov. 2008). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Treatment by Society and Authorities

The EAJCW reported that

[s]ome hostile people verbally or physically attack Jehovah's Witnesses, even threaten to accuse them before the police, knowing the negative decrees issued against them. Being banned, it is difficult for Jehovah's Witnesses to defend their religion and beliefs before the court. (26 Mar. 2010)

On 2 May 2007, the Australian Refugee Review Tribunal indicated in a Research Response on Lebanon that

[Jehovah's Witnesses] cannot legally convene for public assembly or worship without prior approval from the [Lebanese] Interior Ministry. The law also prohibits assembly "in a place open to the public" for groups of three or more persons "for the purpose of committing an offence" or for twenty or more persons "whose attitude is likely to offend public peace". In practice, however, the [Jehovah's Witnesses] are left in peace to assemble and worship. However, as advised by a contact at the Interior Ministry, they may be vulnerable to "hassle" from the security forces if, for example, someone held a grudge.

In 2010, the EAJCW reported that

no specific abuses of religious freedom were recently reported. Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon are thankful for the kind and mild treatment shown by the authorities, especially the toleration of their well-known Christian meetings, allowing the Witnesses to gather peacefully. (26 Mar. 2010)

The *Los Angeles Times* similarly reports that Jehovah's Witnesses prayer gatherings "appear to be tolerated despite fears [of Jehovah's Witnesses] that participants could be harassed or deported" (17 Apr. 2010).

NOW Lebanon reports that "members of a non-recognized [religion] additionally face a curious problem when it comes to their identity cards and passports, as these documents list a person's religion, but only if it is officially recognized" (16 Nov. 2008).

3. Protection

Information on protection available to Jehovah's Witnesses could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of 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 for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following persons were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Professor, California State University Stanislaus; Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, George Mason University; Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Southern California.

Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; BBC; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; *The Daily Star* [Beirut]; eoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; Government of Lebanon; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; Jehovahs-Witness.net; Minority Rights Group International; *L'Orient-Le Jour* [Beirut]; *La Revue du Liban* [Beirut]; UN – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld.

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