



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice Lebanon

Lebanon – LBN35803 – Akkar – Christians
– Chaldean Christians – Islamic
fundamentalists – Muslim-Christian
marriages – State protection

16 December 2009

1. Please provide an up to date assessment on the treatment of Christians in Lebanon, and, more specifically, Chaldean Christians.

Sources indicate that, although the number of Christians in Lebanon has declined throughout the past several decades, Lebanese Christians retain a position of some political power. Lebanon's general election on 7 June 2009 resulted in the return to government of the coalition known as the March 14th alliance, a grouping of Sunni Muslim, Druze and Christian parties: see for example *The Economist* of 11 June 2009.¹

The US Department of State's report on religious freedom in Lebanon released in October 2009 indicated that, notwithstanding "periodic reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice", "relationships among religious adherents of different confessions were generally amicable". The report noted:

Because parity among confessional groups remains a sensitive issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932. However, the most recent demographic study conducted by Statistics Lebanon, a Beirut-based research firm, showed 28 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, 28 percent Shi'a Muslim, 21.5 percent Maronite Christian, 8 percent Greek Orthodox, 5 percent Druze, and 4 percent Greek Catholic. Over the past 60 years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims, mostly due to emigration of large numbers of Maronite Christians and a higher than average birth rate among the Muslim population. There are also very small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Mormons, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Of the 18 officially recognized religious groups, 4 are Muslim, 12 Christian, 1 Druze, and 1 Jewish... Divisions and rivalries among various groups date back many centuries, and while relationships among religious adherents of different confessions were generally amicable, group identity was highly significant in most aspects of cultural interaction.

...

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the freedom to practice all religious rites, provided that public order is not disturbed. The Constitution requires the state to respect all religious groups and denominations and guarantees respect for the personal status and religious interests of persons of every religious sect. The Constitution declares equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference, but stipulates a balance of power distributed among the major religious groups. The Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, there were some restrictions, and the constitutional provision

¹ 'A win for the West' 2009, *The Economist*, 11 June http://www.economist.com/world/middleeast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_TPRPVGNO – Accessed 10 December 2009 – Attachment 1.

for apportioning political offices according to religious affiliation may be viewed as inherently discriminatory.

In most cases, the Government permits recognized religious groups to administer their own family and personal status laws, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. The “Twelver” Shi’a, Sunni, Christian, and Druze confessions have state-appointed, government-subsidized clerical courts that administer family and personal status law...

The Constitution provides that Christians and Muslims be represented equally in Parliament, the Cabinet, and high-level civil service positions, which include the ministry ranks of Secretary General and Director General. It also provides that these posts be distributed proportionally among the recognized religious groups. The constitutional provision for the distribution of political power and positions according to the principle of religious representation is designed to prevent a single confessional group from gaining a dominant position. The “National Pact” of 1943 stipulates that the president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament be Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi’a Muslim, respectively. This distribution of political power operates at both the national and local levels of government.

...

There were periodic reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Following the July-August 2006 conflict with Israel and continuing throughout the year, tensions between the democratically elected government of Fouad Siniora and the antigovernment opposition led by Hizballah resulted in greater political tension among religious groups. While this political climate contributed to periodic reports of tension and occasional confrontations between religious groups during the reporting period, most of this activity could be attributed to political differences and the legacy of the civil war.

The report also observed that Lebanon has continued to receive persons fleeing mistreatment and discrimination in neighbouring states on the basis of their religion, including Chaldean Christians from Iraq and Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan.²

An article dated 24 December 2006 in the *Houston Chronicle* spoke of “fears among Christians and some Muslims that the militant movement spreading throughout the region may transform Lebanon into an Iranian-style Islamic republic”, particularly in the period following the conflict with Israel in 2006, and observed that the Christian population of Lebanon was diminishing due to departures motivated by fears for the future and by perceptions of there being “a better chance to advance in more peaceful and affluent countries”. According to the article:

In Lebanon, the civil war that started in 1975 spurred hundreds of thousands of Christians to seek safety abroad. Christians are now a minority in a country where they used to be the largest religious group. A measure of stability returned to Lebanon when fighting ended in 1990, but that was shattered this summer. The conflict with Israel killed more than 1,000 people and caused an estimated \$4 billion in damage to the country’s infrastructure. Hezbollah, a private Islamic militia funded primarily by Iran, started the fighting when its forces crossed into Israel to ambush Israeli troops. The militia’s leading cleric, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, launched the attack without any input from Lebanon’s elected coalition government, which includes many Christians, including the president, Emile Lahoud. The conflict stoked fears among Christians and some Muslims that the militant movement spreading throughout the region may transform Lebanon into an Iranian-style Islamic republic. “This last war made the Christians lose hope,” said Guita Hourani, a Lebanese Christian who is associate director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center. “Hezbollah refuses to disarm, and they have a political plan and an ideology that does not fit with what Christians

² US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Lebanon*, October – [Attachment 2](#).

and most Lebanese want, which is a functioning democracy that is pluralistic and open. Space for freedom of expression and freedom of faith is being closed off.” Lebanese Christians were able to talk about their concerns before the war, but now they are afraid to speak freely, she said. “People are fearing for the future and trying to get out,” she said. “This war is going to impact the emigration of Christians more than anything we have seen. If other countries open their doors, there will be an exodus.”

Civil war looming?

The November assassination of Christian leader Pierre Gemayel and the push by Hezbollah to oust the government aggravated the situation, raising the specter of renewed civil war between the country’s Muslim and Christian populations. These problems are reflected throughout the Middle East. Circumstances differ in each country the Christians are quitting, but the results are the same. Christians are voting with their feet, leaving the lands where Jesus once walked.

...Christians also leave because they have a better chance to advance in more peaceful and affluent countries. Some can emigrate relatively easily because of family ties in the West. Many already speak English, making it easier to get jobs or places in good schools. The emigration has changed the makeup of Lebanon, where Christians were in the majority when the country achieved independence in 1943. Now they are a shrinking minority.³

Notwithstanding the emigration of many Lebanese Christians, the size of the Chaldean Christian community in Lebanon has increased as Iraqi Christians have sought refuge in “a country where Christians have power”, according to a *Time* article dated 2 April 2007:

It’s hardly surprising that Iraq’s Assyrian and Chaldean Christians would seek refuge from the chaos of post-Saddam Iraq in one of the most Christian countries in the Middle East – almost one third of Lebanon’s population is Christian, and the country’s presidency is reserved for them. “Iraqi Christians feel comfortable in a country where Christians have power,” says Mark Samuel, the president of a Lebanese Assyrian political party. At the town’s Assyrian Church of St. George, Iraqi refugees now make up almost one-third of the congregation...

Lebanon has a growing Iraqi refugee population, currently numbering between 20,000 and 40,000, according to the U.N. – a small fraction of the estimated 2 million Iraqis who have fled the spiraling violence in their country. But what makes Lebanon’s Iraqi refugee intake unusual is that about 30% of them are Christian, although Christians constitute just about 3% of Iraq’s population.

...

Ironically, though, while Christians from Iraq are seeking refuge in Lebanon, many native Lebanese Christians are themselves trying to escape Lebanon’s political and economic crisis. A recent poll of Lebanese Maronites, members of the country’s largest Christian sect, found that half of them are considering leaving for a better life overseas⁴

An article dated 15 March 2008 from *NOW Lebanon* indicated, however, that amongst the broader Lebanese Christian community there was some “fear that the fate of their coreligionists in Iraq... could foreshadow their own future”:

Although their Patriarch is based in Iraq, Chaldean Catholics are one of Lebanon’s 18 officially-recognized sects. As the Iraqi Christians suffer from violence in war-torn Iraq, their

³ Katz, G. 2006, ‘The Silent Exodus – Vanishing Christians of the Mideast’, *Houston Chronicle*, 24 December – Attachment 3.

⁴ Butters, A.L. 2007, ‘Iraq’s Christians Flock to Lebanon’, *Time*, 2 April <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1606015,00.html> – Accessed 10 December 2009 – Attachment 4.

coreligionists are attempting to rally international attention to their plight and provide aid for the Iraqi refugees in Lebanon.

A large number of Iraqi Chaldeans, who make up the largest Christian sect in Iraq, have found their way to Lebanon because of the country's large Christian population...

Many Lebanese Chaldeans see a grim similarity between the plight of the Iraqi Chaldeans and their own situation. They fear that the fate of their coreligionists in Iraq, who found themselves powerless and caught in the middle of a Sunni-Shia civil war, could foreshadow their own future. Kassarji pointed to the many Lebanese Christians who are seeking to leave the country for a more prosperous and stable environment in the West. "The situation is not good in Lebanon," he stated. "If our Christian leaders don't get along with each other, I think after 25 years, or 50 years, we have the same destiny as Iraq."⁵

2. Please provide any evidence that Akkar in northern Lebanon is becoming a more fundamentalist Islamic region.

Information provided by Minority Rights Group International in its overview of Lebanon indicates that "Sunni are concentrated in Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and in the countryside of the Akkar and the central Biqa'a"⁶.

A *Reuters* article dated 13 June 2007 on Sunni Islamist militancy in Lebanon made reference to "the spread of Sunni Islamist thought, especially in and around the northern city of Tripoli, which has long been a cradle for all types of political and militant Sunni Islam". The article reported that "Sunni Islamist schools of thought in Tripoli... include the Salafi school that is linked to the Wahhabi beliefs followed by Osama bin Laden" and that "Salafi Muslims believe they must follow strictly the practices of the Prophet Mohammad and his closest companions". The north of Lebanon is referred to in the article as "the heart of conservative Sunni Islam in the country's diverse sectarian map".⁷

An article on Islamist groups in Lebanon published in the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* in December 2007 observed that Sunni Islamism in Lebanon has exhibited "two distinct ideological currents – political Islamism and Salafism":

Above and beyond the regional conditions fueling Islamic revivalism, Lebanon's weak state, acute socioeconomic and political inequities, and experience of pervasive external intervention converged to create an unusually permissive environment for Islamists. Under these circumstances, radical Islamism has become a powerful instrument of communitarian social mobilization and an effective vehicle for drawing resources from the outside world.

...

Shi'a Islamism in Lebanon has evolved along one broad institutionalized trajectory under the guidance of clerics, a distinct hallmark reflecting the exalted spiritual status of the ulama (religious scholars) in Shi'a Islam and the communitarian solidarity of Lebanese Shi'as. Sunni Islamism in Lebanon has been much more fluid and fragmented, with two distinct ideological currents – political Islamism and Salafism.

⁵ Kenner, D. 2008, 'God's Work', *NOW Lebanon*, 15 March
<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=34789> – Accessed 8 December 2009 – Attachment 5.

⁶ 'Lebanon overview' 2008, Minority Rights Group International, June – Attachment 6.

⁷ 'North Lebanon fertile ground for Sunni militants' 2007, *Reuters*, 13 June – Attachment 7.

The article notes that “a number of Sunni religious movements publicly embracing the idea of an Islamic state” emerged as early as the first decade following Lebanon’s independence in 1943. The article traces the many waves of Islamism in Lebanon in the period since independence, and includes the following reference to the imposition of Islamic law in parts of Tripoli in the midst of the 1975-1990 civil war:

Tawhid forces (swelled by an influx of Syrian Islamists who escaped the Asad regime’s apocalyptic showdown with the Muslim Brotherhood) seized control over much of Tripoli and forged an alliance with the PLO. For two years, they imposed Islamic law at gunpoint in neighborhoods they controlled (e.g. banning alcohol and forcing women to veil) and executed dozens of political opponents (mostly Communists). The shrinking of Tripoli’s Christian minority from 20 percent of the population before the war to five percent today was largely the result of this brief interlude.

In the autumn of 1985, Syrian forces swept into the city and brought Tawhid’s mini-state to an end.

The article observes that “[b]y heavily curtailing the ability of political Islamists to exert influence in national government and indirectly encouraging clerical assaults on secularism and non-Islamic culture, the Syrians unwittingly facilitated the expansion of a more deeply puritanical strand of Sunni Islamism” and makes the following observations regarding Salafism:

Salafism is a puritanical Sunni current that seeks to emulate the “righteous ancestors” (al-salaf al-salih) of early Islamic history and to purge the faith of fallacious innovations (bid’a). While most Salafists pursue this goal non-violently through missionary and educational activity, others (commonly dubbed Salafi-jihadists) embrace violence to achieve its aims. “Both have the same objectivea?! [sic] to convert society into an Islamic society,” explains Lebanese journalist Hazim al-Amin, but “vary in the method of achieving it.” The Salafi current in Tripoli, founded by Shaykh Salim al-Shahal in the mid-1970s, largely confined itself to religious education and charity work for two decades.

In sharp contrast to the political Islamist currents, Salafists and Salafi-jihadists are largely apolitical. The former eschew involvement in local politics so as to maintain the freedom to disseminate their message to the people with minimal interference from the state, while the latter do so to maintain freedom of action in fighting the enemies of Islam abroad. Both abjure any national identity, claiming allegiance to the universal community of Muslim believers (umma).

A second distinguishing feature of Salafi currents is intolerance of heterodox Muslims. Although Tawhid’s aggressive imposition of Islamic law in Tripoli may have appealed to Salafists, Shahal viewed Sha’ban’s close relations with Iran (and, later on, with Syria) as an abomination.

A third important characteristic of the Salafi current in Lebanon is the prominent role of preachers who studied theology in Saudi Arabia, where the ultra-orthodox Wahhabi sect dominates. Salim al-Shahal had very close ties with the late head of Saudi Arabia’s Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (and future grand mufti), Shaykh Abd al-Aziz ibn Abdallah ibn Baz, who arranged for hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinian students to enroll in Islamic studies programs at Saudi universities during the civil war (including Shahal’s son, Dai al-Islam). Fueled by funding from wealthy Saudi donors (and enjoying a measure of immunity from state interference because of close Syrian-Saudi relations), the Salafi current quietly established a strong social foundation in Tripoli and in the nearby Baddawi and Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camps during the early 1990s.

The report notes also that the March 14th coalition – which presently forms government in Lebanon – has “courted Sunni Islamists... in mixed Sunni-Christian districts of north Lebanon”.⁸

An article dated 21 August 2008 in *Al Ahram News Weekly* additionally noted that:

Tripoli and nearby rural areas, such as Akkar, are overwhelmingly Sunni and a breeding ground for Islamist movements – peaceful as well as the militant fringe. They are troubled, marginalised areas, despite their size and sizeable populations. Fighting between Sunni Muslims and Alawites allied with Syria killed 23 people over June and July in desperately poor areas near central Tripoli.⁹

Research Response LBN33661, prepared in September 2008, provides further information on the conflicts in Akkar in mid 2008.¹⁰

3. Please provide evidence of the number of mixed Moslem/Christian marriages in Lebanon and whether such couples face difficulty.

Sources indicate that interfaith marriages are not rare in Lebanon, but no detailed information regarding the number of marriages between Muslim and Christian marriage partners was found amongst the sources consulted.

Information provided in *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* indicates that “in religious law it is legal for a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman, or a woman of any of the Divinely revealed religions”.¹¹ Similarly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* states that “Islamic law provides that ... a Muslim man is entitled to marry a Christian or a Jew”.¹²

Advice provided on the website of a Beirut law firm on the subject of “Mixed Marriage” similarly states that a “Sunni or Shia (Muslim) man can marry a Christian or Jewish woman without her having to convert herself”.¹³

However, other commentary on intermarriage in Lebanon tends to focus on the need for one of the partners to convert if they wish to marry in Lebanon, with reference to the option of a civil marriage being conducted outside of Lebanon.

On these matters, the US Department of State’s recently released report on religious freedom in Lebanon noted that “intermarriage is not uncommon” but is “difficult to arrange”:

Many families have relatives who belong to different religious communities, and intermarriage is not uncommon; however, intermarriage is difficult to arrange in practice between members of some groups. Shari’a, which applies to personal status matters of Muslims, forbids the marriage of a non-Muslim man to a Muslim woman... There are no

⁸ Gambill, G.C. 2007, ‘Islamist Groups in Lebanon’ in *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, December – Attachment 8.

⁹ ‘Tripoli Rumbles on’ 2008, *Al Ahram News Weekly*, 21 August – Attachment 9.

¹⁰ RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33661*, 9 September – Attachment 10.

¹¹ ‘Marriage’ in Glasse, C. 2001, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Stacey International, p.296 – Attachment 11.

¹² ‘Intermarriage’ in Esposito, J.L. (ed) 2003, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford University Press, p.139 – Attachment 12.

¹³ ‘Marriage Law in Lebanon’ (undated), Mattar Law Firm website <http://www.mattarlaw.com/Lawyers-in-Lebanon/Marriage-In-Lebanon/Marriage-Law-Lawyer-in-Lebanon.htm> – Accessed 14 December 2009 – Attachment 13.

procedures for civil marriage; however, the Government recognizes civil marriage ceremonies performed outside the country.²

Advice provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in February 2008 on the subject of religious conversions in Lebanon observed, however, that “in Lebanon, conversions between religions are relatively common, to allow for inter-faith marriages and greater flexibility in inheritance law”.¹⁴

A *NOW Lebanon* article from November 2008 on Jehovah’s Witnesses noted that religious identity in Lebanon is closely tied to social and political identity, citing the view of one scholar with the United Bible Society that, in Lebanon, “[c]onverting is disloyalty, and those who do are generally banished from their families”:

Diab, the scholar with the United Bible Society, stressed that Witnesses face particular trouble in Lebanon because one’s religious identity is so closely tied to one’s place in both society and politics.

“In Lebanon, belonging to a confession is more than having certain theological beliefs,” he said. “It’s having a certain social identity or [akin to] belonging to a tribe. In Europe or the [US], every 10 minutes you can change your religious affiliation. In Lebanon belonging to a religious confession is very historical. A big part of social life is based on belonging.”

Converting is disloyalty, and those who do are generally banished from their families, Diab added¹⁵.

An article dated 16 February 2009 from *GlobalPost* states rather unequivocally that “anyone wishing to marry across sects – a Muslim to a Christian, or a Christian to a Druze – must convert to the religion in which the ceremony will be held”:

Religious institutions are powerful in Lebanon. At birth, each citizen in the country is legally categorized into one of Lebanon’s 18 officially recognized religious sects...

[O]ne’s religious identity is also a legal identity. It’s how Lebanese are classified when they vote, and when they get married.

The Lebanese government, although secular, gives recognized religious groups control over marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. That means different laws apply to different religions. Muslim men can have four wives, Christians cannot.

Each religious authority applies its own laws when a couple is married. If Lebanese take the civil route and marry outside Lebanon, the country’s laws where they are married apply to their marriage in Lebanon.

But for Lebanese who tie the knot here, the marriage law means that anyone wishing to marry across sects – a Muslim to a Christian, or a Christian to a Druze – must convert to the religion in which the ceremony will be held.¹⁶

An article dated 3 September 2009 in *The Economist* reported that any change to the Lebanese laws governing marriage is likely to come slowly:

¹⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report No. 773 – Lebanon: RRT Information Request LBN32828*, 13 February – Attachment 14.

¹⁵ Nash, M. 2008, ‘Faith comes knocking’, *NOW Lebanon*, 16 November <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=67298#> – Accessed 14 April 2009 – Attachment 15.

¹⁶ Gilbert, B. 2009, ‘Some Lebanese call for civil unions’, *GlobalPost*, 16 February – Attachment 16.

Civil-rights lobbyists have long argued that marital status should be determined independently of the religious authorities. Pollsters have found a majority in favour of allowing civil marriage in Lebanon. On Valentine's Day this year campaigners protested against the law by staging jovial mock wedding ceremonies in a Beirut bar.

Change, if it comes, may be slow. The last serious effort to allow civil unions was in 1998. But campaigners notched up a small victory earlier this year when the interior minister, Ziad Baroud, ruled that Lebanese citizens would have the option of removing their religious-group classification from their national identity cards.¹⁷

An article in *USA Today* on 18 October 2009 reported that, according to the government of Cyprus, "523 couples from Lebanon" were married in civil ceremonies in Cyprus in 2008.¹⁸

4. Please provide evidence as to whether a young Sunni man in the Akkar region could obtain state protection if his family sought to kill or harm him because of his relationship with a Christian girl.

No specific information was found regarding the extent to which a young Sunni man in the Akkar region would be able to obtain state protection from harm threatened or inflicted by his family.

Information located on honour crimes in Lebanon seems to contemplate only circumstances in which a woman is harmed; however, it may be of some relevance that Lebanon's legal system reportedly treats crimes committed "in response to a socially unacceptable sexual relationship by the victim" with some leniency. The US Department of State's *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Lebanon* observed that:

According to the penal code, a man who kills his wife or other female relative may receive a reduced sentence if he demonstrates that he committed the crime in response to a socially unacceptable sexual relationship conducted by the victim. For example, while the penal code stipulates that murder is punishable by either a life sentence or the death penalty, if a defendant can prove it was an honor crime, the sentence is commuted to seven years' imprisonment at most.¹⁹

The UK Home Office's *Operational Guidance Note – Lebanon*, issued in June 2009, observed that:

Domestic violence and honour crimes are serious problems in Lebanon and the authorities are not always able and willing to provide sufficiency of protection. However, protection may be available in individual cases from the authorities, NGOs or extended family. Alternatively, internal relocation to escape a localised threat from a husband or member of the family may be an option and would not be unduly harsh in many cases. Factors such as the economic, social and professional background of an individual claimant as well as other factors including the individual's support network must be carefully considered when determining the viability or otherwise of internal relocation.²⁰

A 2002 DFAT report on the level of state protection available to persons who, having converted from Sunni Islam to Christianity, fear harm from members of their former faith

¹⁷ 'Lebanon's mixed marriages: Not at home' 2009, *The Economist*, 3 September – Attachment 17.

¹⁸ 'In Mideast, interfaith couples travel to Cyprus to wed' 2009, *USAToday*, 19 October http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-10-18-cyprus-weddings_N.htm – Accessed 11 December 2009 – Attachment 18).

¹⁹ US Department of State 2009, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Lebanon*, February, Section 5 – Attachment 19.

²⁰ UK Home Office 2009, *Operational Guidance Note – Lebanon*, June, Section 3.9.13 – Attachment 20.

provides information from a DFAT contact officer who “confirmed that the Lebanese authorities would not provide assistance or protection for converts seeking refuge in the newly-adopted community, except through normal police protection against behaviour which might be deemed to be criminal”:

Lebanese citizens are not prevented, under Lebanese civil or criminal law, from converting between religions, including from Islam to Christianity. The contact officer advised us that converts are, in fact, required to declare and register their change of religious status with the civil registration office, affirming that the choice to convert is not proscribed in civil or criminal law.

Against the above, we confirm that conversion does not attract official prosecution, or persecution, and is protected (through registration) under civil law. Moreover, we are not aware of any articles in the Lebanese criminal code which apply criminal sanction against a convert but we would not discard the strong likelihood that, against the norms of Lebanon’s highly-confessionalised society, a convert would be subjected to personal persecution from family members or other members of the sectarian community to which he/she formerly belonged.

In these circumstances, the contact officer said that the convert would probably wish to seek refuge in suburbs occupied by the community of the newly-adopted confessional group (Lebanon is segregated unofficially along confessional lines). The individual might also obtain assistance from local religious authorities or others. However, the contact officer confirmed that the Lebanese authorities would not provide assistance or protection for converts seeking refuge in the newly-adopted community, except through normal police protection against behaviour which might be deemed to be criminal.

For background, you might wish to consider that conversion from Islam to any other religion, according to Sharia (or Koranic) law, is regarded as apostasy and punishable – according to a strict application of Sharia law – by death. While this might be practiced in more conservative Islamic communities elsewhere in the Arab world (such as Saudi Arabia), we are not aware of this ever having taken place in Lebanon. In any event, while Sharia courts are influential – especially on personal status issues – the execution of apostates would not be permitted by a Lebanese criminal court.

However, the contact officer noted that, should an apostate be murdered by a Muslim implementing Sharia-style justice, the authorities would be faced with practical difficulties in bringing the murderer to trial. The contact officer said the religious sensitivities would probably preclude individuals of that sect from giving evidence in court.²¹

Further information regarding conversion from Islam to Christianity in Lebanon is provided in *Research Response LBN35404* of 16 September 2009.²²

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

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Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

United Nations (UN)

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld

²¹ DIMA Country Information Service 2002, *Country Information Report No.108/02 – Treatment of Sunni Moslems converting to Christianity*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 3 April 2002), 2 May – Attachment 21.

²² RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response LBN35404*, 16 September – Attachment 22.

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/refworld/rwmain>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

International Crisis Group website <http://www.crisisgroup.org/>

International News & Politics

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

The Daily Star <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/>

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REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

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