



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Jordan

Jordan – JOR38218 – Christian – Baptist –
Attacks – State Protection

15 February 2011

1. Are Born Again or Evangelical Christians targeted by extremist groups in Jordan?

No information was found on the specific targeting of Born Again or Evangelical Christians by extremist groups in Jordan. There have been reports of Christians in general being targeted by extremist groups, though it is much rarer than in other countries throughout the region.

Reports state that in 2008 alleged Jordanian members of Al Qaeda attacked two Churches including a Latin Church in Irbid. An October 2009 report by the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor* stated that Christians and their places of worship were not formerly major targets for extremists. Now, however, inspired by the late leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – who left a legacy of targeting the “non-believers” – a new generation of Islamic extremists has been inspired to attack Christians.¹ A December 2008 article published in *The National* (UAE/Abu Dhabi) states that “The rising tide of Islamism in the region has also become a source of concern for Christian families”.²

To date, there is no information to indicate that such extremist views have permeated the rest of Jordan's Muslim population and the threat faced by Jordan's Christians is far less than in neighbouring countries. Several sources confirm that Jordanian Christians, by and large, do not feel threatened and live harmoniously with local Muslims.³

The targeting by extremists of Muslims who convert to Christianity is, however, more likely. This suggests a potential threat to those who assist in conversions as well. The US DOS stated that in 2009 “Muslims who converted to other religions faced societal discrimination

¹ Batal al Shishani, M. 2009, ‘Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan’ *The Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, 13 November, vol.7, Issue no. 34

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35727&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=2fc8c6320d](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35727&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=2fc8c6320d) – Accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 1; ‘Jordan: 12 men charged with terrorist attacks’ 2009, Associated Press, 27 January – Attachment 2

² Ma’ayeh, S.P. 2008, ‘Christmas cheer alive in Jordan’ *The National* (Abu Dhabi), 24 December <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20081224/FOREIGN/246644891/1011> – Accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 3

³ Ma’ayeh, S.P. 2008, ‘Christmas cheer alive in Jordan’ *The National* (Abu Dhabi), 24 December <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20081224/FOREIGN/246644891/1011> – Accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 3; Houser, G. 2009, ‘Jordan: An oasis of peace, Reflections from a trip to Jordan’ *The Mennonite*, 1 December http://www.themennonite.org/issues/12-22/articles/Jordan_An_oasis_of_peace- Accessed 27 April 2010 – Attachment 4; Schreuder, S. 2009, ‘Country Update: Jordan’ European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity website, 10 December <http://www.europeanforum.net/country/jordan> – Accessed 27 April 2010 – Attachment 5

and the threat of mental and physical abuse” including from religious leaders.⁴ The Christian website Open Doors adds “Many Muslims who become Christians maintain a low profile in order to avoid harassment”.⁵ In 2004 DFAT stated that if “apostasy is proven in court then the verdict is given that the person is an apostate and is a proscribed person whom any Muslim may kill”.⁶

Given recent instability in Egypt and other Arab countries, there may be potential for change in this status quo in the event of similar upheavals in Jordan. The Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition in Egypt, is also the most prominent opposition in Jordan. While the Brotherhood’s political wing, the Islamic Action Front Party (IAF) seeks the application of Islamic Sharia in various fields of life,⁷ it does not advocate the use of violence to achieve its domestic political goals.⁸ Of interest, in February 2007, a Christian was elected to the administrative board of the IAF’s Amman branch, becoming the first non-Muslim to join the leadership of the organisation. He, however, resigned shortly after citing “religious and Christian pressure”.⁹

2. Does Jordanian law forbid ‘preaching’ or proselytising to Muslims?

Neither the constitution, the penal code, nor civil legislation forbids efforts to proselytise to Muslims. Despite this, the US DOS argued in 2010 that the Government effectively prohibits conversion from Islam as it accords primacy to Islamic law, which governs Muslims’ personal status and prohibits them from converting.¹⁰ A previous US DOS report from 2008 states that “Shari’a courts have the authority to prosecute proselytisers”.¹¹ The Open Doors website, a UK Christian organisation dedicated to “serving persecuted Christians worldwide”, states public proselytising of Muslims runs against government policy.¹²

Furthermore, the website states that “pressure has increased on foreign Christians, with some pastors being deported for ‘illegal’ missionary activities”.¹³ The US DOS adds the Government “harassed some citizens and resident foreign groups suspected of proselytising

⁴ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Jordan*, 17 November – Attachment 6

⁵ ‘Country Profiles – Jordan’ (undated), Open Doors website

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/wwl.php?country=37> – Accessed 1 September 2009 – Attachment 7

⁶ DIMIA Country Information Service 2004, *Country Information Report No. 30/04 – Jordan: How Apostasy is dealt with in Jordan*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 24 March 2004), 1 April – Attachment 8

⁷ Al Abbadi, A.S 2007, ‘Jordanian IAF Christian Member Resigns Over Pressures’ Ikhwanweb.com website, 26 February <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=2321> – Accessed 20 April 2010 – Attachment 9

⁸ Glennie, A. 2007, ‘Reform in Jordan: The role of Political Islamists’ November, Institute for Public Policy Research website, 19 November, p11 <http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=576> – Accessed 20 April 2010 – Attachment 10

⁹ Glennie, A. 2007, ‘Reform in Jordan: The role of Political Islamists’ November, Institute for Public Policy Research website, 19 November, p14 <http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=576> – Accessed 20 April 2010 – Attachment 10; Al Abbadi, A.S 2007, ‘Jordanian IAF Christian Member Resigns Over Pressures’ Ikhwanweb.com website, 26 February <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=2321> – Accessed 20 April 2010 – Attachment 9

¹⁰ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Jordan*, 17 November – Attachment 6

¹¹ US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – Jordan*, 19 September – Attachment 11

¹² ‘Country Profiles – Jordan’ (undated), Open Doors website

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/wwl.php?country=37> – Accessed 1 September 2009 – Attachment 7

¹³ ‘Country Profiles – Jordan’ (undated), Open Doors website

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/wwl.php?country=37> – Accessed 1 September 2009 – Attachment 7

Muslims”. However, in contrast to Open Doors,¹⁴ it argues the intensity of this harassment declined during 2009:

In late 2007 and early 2008, approximately 30 foreign resident members of evangelical churches, many of whom were longtime residents of the country, were deported, refused renewal of residency permits, or denied re-entry after exiting the country. The government cited as the reasons for these decisions concern for the evangelicals' personal safety, violation of immigration regulations, and unspecified unlawful actions while in the country. Some of the evangelicals were questioned and detained without charge by GID officials before deportation. The government permitted four of the evangelicals to return to the country in 2008. These evangelicals retained residency in the country throughout the reporting period.¹⁵

The US DOS comments were, however, questioned by Jordanian Church leaders. In his capacity as chairman of the Council of Heads of Churches in Jordan, Patriarch Theophilus III stated that “Jordan provides an example of Islamic-Christian harmony as both Muslims and Christians enjoy equal rights and duties”.¹⁶

The above expulsions by the Government were also said to be partly the result of complaints by established Christian church groups in Jordan who are hostile towards foreign proselytisers or evangelicals. The World Council of Churches representative Awda Qawas stated, of the foreign evangelicals, that “they come as individuals, and they exploit the citizens of this nation, recruiting them for their interests”. Evangelicals were accused of attracting poor and unemployed youth, drawing them from established churches, and “tempting them with facilitations and missionary jobs in Jordan and various Arab countries”. Religious leaders had apparently been “complaining for many years about the role of missionary groups in Jordan”. They had asked the Government to prevent foreign missionaries establishing a “theological institute” in Jordan.¹⁷

The attitude of the leaders of Jordan’s established churches toward the local evangelical churches, however, seemed more positive. John Nour, Secretary of the Council of the Church Leaders of Jordan, which includes clergy from the Catholic, Orthodox and Armenian churches, stated that “The evangelical churches have a lot of respect here from the traditional churches and from the government”.¹⁸

3. Is state protection denied to Baptist Church members?

No information was found specifically relating to Baptist Church members but information relating to Christians in general is likely to be applicable to a certain degree. Sources suggest that state protection is available to Christians.

¹⁴ “Country Profiles – Jordan’ (undated), Open Doors website

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/wwl.php?country=37> – Accessed 1 September 2009 – Attachment 7

¹⁵ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Jordan*, 17 November – Attachment 6

¹⁶ Christian leaders dispute US report on religious freedoms in Jordan’ 2010, *World Religious News*

<http://www.wrnl.org/articles/34563/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 12

¹⁷ Reynolds, J. 2008, ‘Jordan Deports Evangelical Christians’, Crosswalks website

<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/religiontoday/11570428/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 13

¹⁸ Reynolds, J. 2008, ‘Jordan Deports Evangelical Christians’, Crosswalks website

<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/religiontoday/11570428/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 13

After the aforementioned attacks by Al Qaeda operatives on two churches in 2008, the accused were tried, convicted and sentenced to substantial jail terms. Also, in March 2009 the State Security Court of Jordan sentenced three Jordanians to 22½ years in prison for plotting a suicide car bomb attack on a church in Amman.¹⁹

The official views of the Government also suggest that state protection is available to Christians. Several sources state that the Constitution of Jordan provides for freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.²⁰ The Jordanian government has been regularly lauded for its efforts to encourage inter-faith dialogue.²¹ According to the US DOS, Christians served regularly as cabinet ministers, and in December 2009 the king appointed four Christians to the upper house of parliament. Of the 110 seats of the lower house of parliament, nine are reserved for Christians.

Christians' relatively high status in society also suggests they are likely to receive state protection. International Christian Concern reported that Christians are represented in government, media, and academia in numbers higher than their percentage in the population.²² In 2007, Jordan's Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought issued a letter to Pope Benedict which highlighted the commonalities between Christianity and Islam. It is considered the world's leading interfaith dialogue initiative between Christians and Muslims.²³

4. Was the Baptist Church in Diwir Nisim, Irbid shut down in late February 2008?

A February 2009 article from a Christian missionary website contains information suggesting that two Baptist Churches exist in Irbid and both are still active. The Churches were said to be involved in a "monthly city-wide intercessory prayer meeting". There was no mention of either of them being shut down. The article did not specify whether either church was located in Diwir Nisim.²⁴ The US DOS states that Baptists are a denomination that is registered with

¹⁹ Batal al Shishani, M. 2009, 'Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan' The Jamestown Foundation *Terrorism Monitor*, 13 November, vol.7, Issue no. 34

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35727&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=2fc8c6320d](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35727&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=2fc8c6320d) – Accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 1; 'Jordan: 12 men charged with terrorist attacks' 2009, Associated Press, 27 January – Attachment 2

²⁰ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Jordan*, 26 October, Section 1 – Attachment 14; International Christian Concern 2003, 'Middle East: Jordan' International Christian Concern website, January <http://persecution.org/Countries/jordan.html> – Accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 15; Kumpf, D. 2009, 'The Kingdom of Jordan: Intra-faith Dialogue, Inter-faith Diplomacy' The Review of Faith and International Affairs website, 20 March <http://www.rfiaonline.org/extras/articles/411-jordan-dialogue-and-diplomacy> – Accessed 29 April 2010 – Attachment 16

²¹ 'King: Interfaith dialogue necessary to end conflicts' 2008, *Jordan News Agency*, 13 November <http://www.petra.gov.jo/Artical.aspx?Lng=1&Section=8&Artical=71009> – Accessed 29 April 2010 – Attachment 17

²² International Christian Concern 2003, 'Middle East: Jordan' International Christian Concern website, January <http://persecution.org/Countries/jordan.html> – Accessed 19 April 2010 – Attachment 15

²³ Robinson, B.A. 2007, 'Islam and peace: A letter from 138 Muslim scholars to Christians, at the end of Ramadan, 2007' ReligiousTolerance.org website, 16 October <http://www.religioustolerance.org/islpeace.htm> – Accessed 29 April 2010 – Attachment 18; 'Introduction to a Common Word between Us and You' (undated) The Official website of A Common Word <http://www.acommonword.com/> – Accessed 29 April 2010 – Attachment 19

²⁴ 'Archive for JORDAN: Pastor Bolis Abadeer of Irbid, Jordan' 2009, The Jurjevich Journal website, 6 February <http://robertjurjevich.wordpress.com/category/nations/jordan/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 20

the Ministry of Interior as a 'society' but not as a church.²⁵ Of note is that a new Pentecostal Christian church was opened in 2009 which the support of King Abdullah II of Jordan.²⁶

5. Is preaching or evangelism a core tenet of the Baptist religion?

The Religion Facts website states that "most Baptists are evangelical in doctrine" but notes that "Baptist beliefs can vary due to the congregational governance system that gives autonomy to individual local Baptist churches".²⁷ The US has the largest number of Baptists and the largest organisation of Baptist churches in the US is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).²⁸ The SBC's mission statement is clearly evangelical, stating that "our missional vision is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations".²⁹

Attachments

1. Batal al Shishani, M. 2009, 'Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan' The Jamestown Foundation *Terrorism Monitor*, 13 November, vol.7, Issue no. 34
[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35727&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=2fc8c6320d](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35727&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=2fc8c6320d) – Accessed 19 April 2010.
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4. Houser, G. 2009, 'Jordan: An oasis of peace, Reflections from a trip to Jordan' *The Mennonite*, 1 December http://www.themennonite.org/issues/12-22/articles/Jordan_An_oasis_of_peace- Accessed 27 April 2010.
5. Schreuder, S. 2009, 'Country Update: Jordan' European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity website, 10 December <http://www.europeanforum.net/country/jordan> – Accessed 27 April 2010.
6. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Jordan*, 17 November.
7. 'Country Profiles – Jordan' (undated), Open Doors website
<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/wwl.php?country=37> – Accessed 1 September 2009.

²⁵ US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 - Jordan*, 15 September – Attachment 21

²⁶ 'Jordan - New Church for Irbid' 2009, Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association website
http://www.jmeca.org.uk/biblelands_pentecost2009/biblelands_jerusalem_jordan.html – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 22

²⁷ 'Baptists' 2011, Religion Facts website <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/denominations/baptists.htm> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 23

²⁸ Bowker, J. 1997, 'Southern Baptist Convention', Encyclopaedia.com website
<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/denominations/baptists.htm> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 24

²⁹ 'Mission and Vision' 2011, Southern Baptist Convention Official website
<http://www.sbc.net/missionvision.asp> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 25

8. DIMIA Country Information Service 2004, *Country Information Report No. 30/04 – Jordan: How Apostasy is dealt with in Jordan*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 24 March 2004), 1 April. (CISNET – Jordan: CX92102)
9. Al Abbadi, A.S 2007, 'Jordanian IAF Christian Member Resigns Over Pressures' Ikhwanweb.com website, 26 February <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=2321> – Accessed 20 April 2010.
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13. Reynolds, J. 2008, 'Jordan Deports Evangelical Christians', Crosswalks website <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/religiontoday/11570428/> – Accessed 14 February 2011.
14. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Jordan*, 26 October, Section 1.
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17. 'King: Interfaith dialogue necessary to end conflicts' 2008, *Jordan News Agency*, 13 November <http://www.petra.gov.jo/Artical.aspx?Lng=1&Section=8&Artical=71009> – Accessed 29 April 2010.
18. Robinson, B.A. 2007, 'Islam and peace: A letter from 138 Muslim scholars to Christians, at the end of Ramadan, 2007' ReligiousTolerance.org website, 16 October <http://www.religioustolerance.org/islpeace.htm> – Accessed 29 April 2010.
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22. 'Baptists' 2011, Religion Facts website
<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/denominations/baptists.htm> – Accessed 14 February 2011.
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<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/denominations/baptists.htm> – Accessed 14 February 2011.
24. 'Mission and Vision' 2011, Southern Baptist Convention Official website
<http://www.sbc.net/missionvision.asp> – Accessed 14 February 2011.