



1. Please provide information on the number, status, activities and profile of Catholics in Syria.

Syria has a population of 20 million of which Christians constitute 10%.¹ There are 368,000 Catholics in Syria, approximately 2% of the total population.² The Catholics of Syria follow several different rites, including Armenian, Chaldean, Syrian, Maronite, Melkite (Greek) and Catholics of the Latin Rite.³ The largest Catholic church in the country is the Greek Catholic Church (Melkite).⁴

According to the US Department of State, most Christians live in urban centers in and around Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Lattakia, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast.⁵

The Melkite Church

The Melkite Church is a community with its religious centre in Syria.⁶ In 2008, there were approximately 234,000 adherents in Syria.⁷ Greek Catholic communities are Arab Syrians but are called Greek to highlight that their religious celebrations are focused on the Greek / Byzantine rites.⁸ The Church is affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, through the regime of Eastern Rite Churches, allowing it a great deal of autonomy and the right to preserve its original character. The Patriarch of the church is in Damascus.⁹ The

¹ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26, Section 1 – Attachment 1.

² 'Roman Catholicism in Syria' updated 25 August 2009, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_Syria – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 2. Please Note: [Wikipedia](#) is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is compiled collaboratively by volunteers. Wikipedia articles can be useful introductory reading for a new topic, and the list of references in Wikipedia articles can provide useful leads to reliable sources. Many Wikipedia articles can be highly reliable, especially in regards to non-controversial historical or factual matters, and Wikipedia uses preventative measures against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy. However, the collaborative nature of Wikipedia makes it vulnerable to contributors with overt or covert agendas, and Wikipedia articles are thus prone to unacknowledged bias.

³ 'Roman Catholicism in Syria' updated 25 August 2009, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_Syria – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 2.

⁴ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26, Section 1 – Attachment 1.

⁵ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26, Section 1 – Attachment 1.

⁶ Kjeilen, T. (undated), 'Melkite Greek Catholic Church' *LookLex Encyclopaedia* <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/melkite.htm> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

⁷ Roberson, R.G (ed). (undated), 'Eastern Catholic Churches 2008' Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, source: Annuario Pontificio <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat08.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 4.

⁸ Minority Rights Group International 2008, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Syria: Christians, Armenians and Assyrians* <http://www.minorityrights.org/5277/syria/christians-armenians-and-assyrians.html> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 5.

⁹ Kjeilen, T. (undated), 'Melkite Greek Catholic Church' *LookLex Encyclopaedia* <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/melkite.htm> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

current Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch is Gregory III Laham.¹⁰ The liturgy of the church is performed in vernacular Arabic. The priests of the Melkite Church are allowed to marry.¹¹ In Syria, the Church has dioceses overseeing Aleppo, Bosra and Hauran, Homs, Hama and Yabroud, Latakia and the Valley of the Christians.¹²

The Maronite Church

The Maronite Church is a Christian community, centred to Lebanon, and affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church as part of the Eastern Rite. In 2008, there were about 50,000¹³ adherents in Syria, headed by the archdioceses of Aleppo and Damascus, and the Diocese of Latakia. The spiritual head of the Maronites is the Patriarch of Antioch, who resides in Jounieh, north of Beirut.¹⁴ Adherents live in Aleppo, Tartus, Latakia and Damascus.¹⁵

The Syriac Catholic Church

The Syriac Catholic Church, or Syrian Catholic Church, is one of the Eastern Catholic Churches. They have a separate church organisation from the Melkites, Maronites, and Chaldeans.¹⁶ The Syriac Catholic Church was formally and officially united with Rome in 1781.¹⁷ There are approximately 30,000 Syrian Catholics in Syria with other communities.¹⁸ Adherents mainly reside in Jazira and Aleppo.¹⁹ The Patriarch of this church has the title of Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syrians and resides in Beirut, Lebanon. In 2009, the newly-elected Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan became the head of the Syriac Catholic Church.²⁰ They follow the liturgy of St. James which is performed in Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic). Syriac is still spoken in some communities in eastern Syria but for most, Arabic is the vernacular language.²¹

¹⁰ 'Melkite Greek Catholic Church' updated 13 March 2010, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melkite_Catholic_Church#The_Church_in_modern_times – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 6.

¹¹ Kjeilen, T. (undated), 'Melkite Greek Catholic Church' *LookLex Encyclopaedia* <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/melkite.htm> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 3.

¹² 'Melkite Greek Catholic Church' updated 13 March 2010, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melkite_Catholic_Church#The_Church_in_modern_times – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 6.

¹³ Roberson, R.G (ed). (undated), 'Eastern Catholic Churches 2008' Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, source: *Annuario Pontificio* <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat08.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 4.

¹⁴ Kjeilen, T. (undated), 'Maronite Church' *LookLex Encyclopaedia* <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/melkite.htm> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 7.

¹⁵ 'Overview of Religious History of Syria' 2001, Eternal Word Television Network website, source: *L'Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English, 9 May, p. 16 <http://www.ewtn.net/library/CHISTORY/SYRIAHIS.HTM> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 8.

¹⁶ 'Syriac Catholic Church' updated 15 December 2009, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syriac_Catholic_Church – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 9.

¹⁷ 'History of The Syriac Catholic Church' (undated), Syriac Catholic Youth Club website <http://www.clubsyriaque.org/glace-fr.html> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 10.

¹⁸ Kjeilen, T. (undated), 'Syrian Catholic Church' *LookLex Encyclopaedia* http://i-cias.com/e.o/syr_cath.htm – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 11; 'Syriac Leader Renews Communion With Rome' 2009, Zenit.org, 17 June <http://www.zenit.org/article-26201?l=english> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 12.

¹⁹ 'Overview of Religious History of Syria' 2001, Eternal Word Television Network website, source: *L'Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English, 9 May, p. 16 <http://www.ewtn.net/library/CHISTORY/SYRIAHIS.HTM> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 8.

²⁰ 'Syriac Catholic Church' updated 15 December 2009, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syriac_Catholic_Church – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 9.

²¹ 'History of The Syriac Catholic Church' (undated), Syriac Catholic Youth Club website <http://www.clubsyriaque.org/glace-fr.html> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 10.

The Armenian Catholic Church

The Armenian Catholic Church is a semi-independent Christian church that is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church through the Eastern Rite. The Armenian Catholic Church has retained its identity distinct from the Roman Catholic Church, and the liturgy is performed in Classical Armenian. Today, the leader of the church, the Patriarch of the Catholic Armenians and Katholikos of Cilicia, resides in Beirut, Lebanon.²² The present head is Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni.²³ The Armenian Catholics have three dioceses in Syria (Damascus, Aleppo, Kamishli) that depend on the Armenian Catholic Katholikos in Beirut.²⁴ In 2008, there were 26,000 adherents in Syria.²⁵ The majority of adherents live in Aleppo, Jazira and Lattakia.²⁶

The Chaldean Catholic Church

The Chaldean Catholic Church is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church through the Eastern Rite. The head of the church is based in Baghdad, Iraq, and his title is Katholikos Patriarch. Presently this position is held by His Holiness, Mar Rophael 1 Bidawid. The Syrian members are led by the Diocese of Aleppo. The Chaldeans still embrace their East Syrian liturgy of Addai and Mari, performing it in Syriac.²⁷ In 2008, there were approximately 15,000 adherents in Syria.²⁸

The Catholics of the Latin Rite

The Catholics of the Latin Rite in Syria live in Aleppo and Damascus and depend on an apostolic vicar established in Aleppo. One source claims there are only 3000 adherents in Syria²⁹, whilst another source states they account for around 11,000 adherents.³⁰ No other information was found on this Church.

According to a 2001 article by *Middle East Quarterly*, Christians in Syria are well represented in the liberal professions (lawyers, doctors) and the technical professions (engineers). In cities, Christian small traders and craftsmen are “very dynamic”.³¹ A 2004 article by *Catholic News Service* noted that weekly liturgical attendance in Syria is very

²² Kjeilen, T. (undated), ‘Armenian Catholic Church’ *LookLex Encyclopaedia*

http://i-cias.com/e.o/arm_cath.htm – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 13.

²³ ‘Armenian Catholic Church’ last updated 14 February 2010, Wikipedia website

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Catholic_Church – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 14.

²⁴ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, ‘Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East’ *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

²⁵ Roberson, R.G (ed). (undated), ‘Eastern Catholic Churches 2008’ Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, source: Annuario Pontificio <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat08.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 4.

²⁶ ‘Overview of Religious History of Syria’ 2001, Eternal Word Television Network website, source: *L’Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English, 9 May, p. 16

<http://www.ewtn.net/library/CHISTORY/SYRIAHIS.HTM> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 8.

²⁷ Kjeilen, T. (undated), ‘Chaldean Catholic Church’ *LookLex Encyclopaedia* <http://i-cias.com/e.o/chaldean.htm> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 16.

²⁸ Roberson, R.G (ed). (undated), ‘Eastern Catholic Churches 2008’ Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, source: Annuario Pontificio <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat08.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2010 – Attachment 4.

²⁹ ‘Overview of Religious History of Syria’ 2001, Eternal Word Television Network website, source: *L’Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English, 9 May, p. 16

<http://www.ewtn.net/library/CHISTORY/SYRIAHIS.HTM> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 8.

³⁰ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, ‘Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East’ *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

³¹ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, ‘Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East’ *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

high and many young people return during the week for catechism, charity clubs, Scouts or prayer meetings. One expert estimated that 60 percent of Syria's Catholic youths belong to some kind of church movement or group.³²

According to several sources, emigration is a serious problem for the Christian churches; at least 250,000 Christians have left Syria since 1958. Reasons include nationalisation of schools and the Syrian economy in the 1960s; drought in rural areas such as in the Djezirah province; expansion of the Muslim Kurdish population in some areas and the ability of the elite to send their children to study abroad.³³ According to a 2004 article by *Catholic News Service*, in order to encourage Christians in Syria to stay, the Melkite Church, aided by recent changes in the law which previously nationalised all schools, has begun to establish Catholic schools again and develop low-rent housing for local parishioners.³⁴

2. Please provide information on the attitude of the authorities towards Catholics in Syria. Is there any evidence to suggest that Catholics are being mistreated, prevented from practising their religion or denied access to services, in particular those engaged in proselytisation?

There is no evidence of specific mistreatment of Catholics, including being prevented from practising their religion or denied access to services, in Syria. The government discourages proselytisation and occasionally prosecutes missionaries for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups", though there were no recent reports of people being prosecuted for such activities.

According to the US Department of State 2009 Human Rights Report on Syria, there is no official state religion; however, the constitution requires that the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation.³⁵

According to a number of sources Christians in Syria are widely tolerated. State schools provide Muslim and Christian religious education in separate classes and Christians are able to operate private schools. In 2006, a new Personal Status Law for Catholics went into effect, giving Catholics their own laws for adoption, inheritance, and guardianship. Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the government permits the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean as "liturgical languages". State holidays include Western Christmas, as well as Orthodox and Western Easter.³⁶ A

³² Thavis, J. 2004, 'Syria's Christian churches face political, religious challenges' *Catholic News Service*, 1 November <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0406003.htm> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 17.

³³ 'Overview of Religious History of Syria' 2001, Eternal Word Television Network website, source: *L'Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English, 9 May, p. 16 <http://www.ewtn.net/library/CHISTORY/SYRIAHIS.HTM> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 8; Mouawad, R.J. 2001, 'Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East' *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.; Thavis, J. 2004, 'Syria's Christian churches face political, religious challenges' *Catholic News Service*, 1 November <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0406003.htm> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 17.

³⁴ Thavis, J. 2004, 'In Syria, Melkite archbishop says church must make its presence known' *Catholic News Service*, 28 October <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0405941.htm> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 18.

³⁵ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Syria*, March, Section 2. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136080.htm> – Accessed 17 March 2010 – Attachment 19.

³⁶ Minority Rights Group International 2008, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Syria: Christians, Armenians and Assyrians* <http://www.minorityrights.org/5277/syria/christians-armenians-and-assyrians.html> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 5; Freedom House 2009, *Freedom in the World for 2008 – Syria* <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7713> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 20; US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009* –

2001 article by *Middle East Quarterly* states that Christians in Syria find it easy to obtain authorisation to repair or build new churches and to pray or have processions in public without harassment. Their religion is not mentioned on identity cards. Friday is the official day off, but in consideration for the Christian population, work starts at 10 a.m. on Sunday.³⁷

Christian Solidarity International claimed in 2007 that Christians in Syria are being “kidnapped, raped, tortured, and killed” and face “economic oppression and religious persecution”.³⁸ A DFAT Report dated 25 July 2007, however, states that “We are not/not aware of any evidence to back up the claims made by Christian Solidarity International about Christians in Syria being ‘kidnapped, raped, tortured and killed’ and ‘facing economic oppression and religious persecution’”. The DFAT report states that it was not aware of any specific barriers which impede access to education, employment, or business opportunities for Christians in Syria. It further states that there are Christian Members of Parliament and senior figures within the Baath party.³⁹

A range of media sources state that the Christian population in Syria formed an alliance with the Alawite minority, who have ruled the country since the late Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970. As a result they feel protected by the current government who require their support in the face of a Sunni majority.⁴⁰ However, according to the 2001 article by *Middle East Quarterly*, Christian participation in power and in the administration in Syria is very low, and Christians practically never appear in key posts such as the secret services, special police, or army units; although there have been Christian ministers in parliament.⁴¹ This is due to the fact that the Alawite minority dominates the officer corps of the military and security forces.⁴² The 2001 article by *Middle East Quarterly* states that the problems Christians face in Syria are associated with living under a dictatorial system of government. Members of the clergy must always express their allegiance to the regime,

Syria, March, Section 2. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136080.htm> – Accessed 17 March 2010 – Attachment 19; ‘SYRIA: Bridging the gap between Muslims and Christians’ 2005, *IRIN News*, 17 October <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25591> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 21; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, DFAT Report No.672 – Syria: Christians: RRT Information Request SYR31953, 25 July – Attachment 22; Dalrymple, W. 2006, ‘The final place of refuge for Christians in the Middle East is under threat’ *The Guardian*, 2 September <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/sep/02/comment.syria> – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 23.

³⁷ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, ‘Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East’ *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

³⁸ Martin. A. 2007, ‘CSI Highlights Plight of Persecuted Christians in Syria, Other Mideast Nations’ ChristiansUnite.com, source: *Agape Press*, 3 January http://news.christiansunite.com/Religion_News/religion05510.shtml – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 24.

³⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, DFAT Report No.672 – Syria: Christians: RRT Information Request SYR31953, 25 July – Attachment 22.

⁴⁰ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, ‘Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East’ *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15; Ghattas, K. 2002, ‘Middle Eastern Christians may face violence’ *BBC News*, 24 December http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2604573.stm – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 25; ‘SYRIA: Bridging the gap between Muslims and Christians’ 2005, *IRIN News*, 17 October <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25591> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 21; Dalrymple, W. 2006, ‘The many and the happy few’ *New Statesman*, 5 June <http://www.newstatesman.com/200606050025> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 26.

⁴¹ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, ‘Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East’ *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

⁴² Freedom House 2009, *Freedom in the World for 2008 – Syria* <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7713> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 20.

they have to report on their activities outside the country when they come back from travel, all associations are carefully scrutinised and importation of foreign books is very difficult.⁴³ US State Department's 2009 International Religious Freedom Report on Syria confirms that the Government continues to monitor the activities of *all* religious groups (emphasis added).⁴⁴

According to Christian Solidarity International, violence against Christians often goes unpunished; referring to a 2004 incident in which two Christians were murdered.⁴⁵ No other sources, however, corroborate these claims. There were no reports of mistreatment of Christians in any recent reports by NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and the Syrian Human Rights Committee. This indicates that Christians, including Catholics, are not mistreated, prevented from practising their religion or denied access to services by the Syrian authorities.

Proselytisation

According to the US State Department's 2009 International Religious Freedom Report on Syria, the Government discourages proselytising, which it deems a threat to relations among religious groups. While there is no civil law prohibiting proselytising, the Government discourages it and occasionally prosecutes missionaries for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups" when they engage in such activities. Most charges of this kind carry sentences of imprisonment from five years to life, although such sentences are often reduced to one or two years. The report, however, stated there were no recent cases of the Government prosecuting anyone for posing a threat to the relations among religious groups.⁴⁶ An analysis of all US State Department reports on Religious Freedom on Syria from 1999-2010 indicates that there were no reported cases of anyone being prosecuted for proselytising from 2001-2010. Earlier reports also make no mention of anyone being prosecuted for this offence.

According to a 2006 report by the conservative World Net Daily on Syria, "A Christian is not allowed to proselytize – ever". Jim Jacobson, president of Christian Freedom International, was also quoted as saying "If you're a Christian, you don't talk about it. If you try to share your faith, distribute Christian literature, distribute a Bible – something any religion should be allowed to do – you're going to get arrested and asked to leave the country. You can't do that there."⁴⁷ A number of other Christian evangelical organisations also claim that proselytisation is not welcome by the Syrian authorities and missionaries are not allowed in Syria.⁴⁸ A DFAT Report dated 25 July 2007, states that "Contacts in Syria noted that the main Christian churches in Syria do not have a history of active

⁴³ Mouawad, R.J. 2001, 'Syria and Iraq – Repression: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East' *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.VIII, no.1 <http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

⁴⁴ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26, Section 2 – Attachment 1.

⁴⁵ 'Countdown for Christians in Syria' (undated) Christian Solidarity International Website http://www.csi-int.org/countdown_for_christians.php – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 27.

⁴⁶ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26, Section 2 – Attachment 1.

⁴⁷ Unruh, B. 2006, "Christians flee Iraq, find Syria 'ruthless': Ministries say believers have no Mideast refuge" *WorldNet Daily*, 29 December http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=53549 – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 28.

⁴⁸ Voice of the Martyrs, *Global Report 2010 – Syria*, (undated) http://www.persecution.com.au/imagesDB/paragraph/Country_Summary.pdf – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 29; 'Syria' (undated), Friends of Arab Christians Ministry website <http://www.facministry.com/countries.php> – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 30; 'Syria' (undated), Open Doors USA website <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/content/view/1008> – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 31; 'Status of the Persecuted Church in Syria' (undated), Smyrna Ministries International website <http://www.smyrnaministries.org/syria> – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 32.

proselytising”.⁴⁹ This is most likely due to the churches’ attempt to maintain good relations with the current government. The World Missions Atlas Project (a consortium of Christian Evangelical organisations), however, claims that there are active Christian evangelical groups in Syria.⁵⁰ There were no reports, however, amongst Christian sources of missionaries being prosecuted for their activities in Syria.

3. Please provide information on the attitude of Islamists and/or Islamic groups towards Christians and Catholics, in particular those engaged in proselytisation.

Very little information was found on this subject. Membership in the Muslim Brotherhood is illegal and Islamists are routinely arrested. It has been reported, however, that the exiled Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has recently embraced democracy. It recently claimed that it would accept a Christian becoming president of Syria indicating that it may have a more moderate attitude towards Christians than other Muslim Brotherhood factions in the Middle East.

The US State Department’s 2009 International Religious Freedom Report on Syria states that membership in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is illegal, as is membership in any “Salafist” organisation, a designation in local parlance denoting Saudi-inspired fundamentalism. Affiliation with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is punishable by death, although in practice the sentence is typically commuted to 12 years in prison.⁵¹ According to a number of sources the Syrian authorities continue to arrest and convict people suspected of being an Islamist.⁵² In a report by the *Catholic News Service*, Syria’s Muslim leaders are vigilant against extremist manifestations of Islam. One local Sheik said that Syrian society is currently “free from the seeds of terrorism and extremism,” and predicted it would remain that way.⁵³

According to the *Political Handbook of the World*, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leadership remains in exile and has recently stopped insisting on the right to use violence, no longer calls for the introduction of sharia, and claims to support a democratic system of government.⁵⁴ In 2007, it was reported that Ali Sadraddin Bayanouni, the head of Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood, has declared that the Brotherhood’s embrace of democracy means that it will accept a woman or Christian becoming president of Syria if they are elected to

⁴⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, DFAT Report No.672 – Syria: Christians: RRT Information Request SYR31953, 25 July – Attachment 22.

⁵⁰ ‘SYRIA: Country Snapshot’ (undated), Missions Atlas Project website, pp12-16 <http://www.worldmap.org/maps/other/profiles/syria/Syria%20Profile.pdf> – Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 33.

⁵¹ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26, Section 2 – Attachment 1.

⁵² Human Rights Watch 2009, *World Report 2009 - Syria*, HRW website, January <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2009> – Accessed 15 January 2009 – Attachment 34; UK Home Office 2009, *Operational Guidance Note: Syria*, February <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/syriaog?view=Binary> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 35; UK Home Office 2009, *Country of Origin Information report – The Syrian Arab Republic*, February, paras 12.11-12.17 – Attachment 36.

⁵³ Thavis, J. 2004, ‘Syria’s Christian churches face political, religious challenges’ *Catholic News Service*, 1 November <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0406003.htm> – Accessed 3 March 2010 – Attachment 17.

⁵⁴ ‘Syria’ 2009, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press Electronic Library http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2009_Syria&type=toc&num=177&PHPSESSID=sv0fhvfpnmku0u1rmvo0o9po36 – Accessed 3 March 2010 (Originally published in *Political Handbook of the World 2009*, edited by Arthur S. Banks, Thomas C. Muller, William R. Overstreet, and Judith F. Isacoff (Washington: CQ Press, 2009) – Attachment 37.

the position.⁵⁵ This indicates that it may have a more moderate attitude towards Christians than other Muslim Brotherhood factions in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, reports indicate a growing concern amongst the Christian population about rising Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East.⁵⁶ According to one source many Syrian Christians fear that they would 'lose out' if the government were to hold free and fair multi-party elections that might bring Islamic radicals to power and any deterioration in the country's economic situation could fuel Muslim resentment against the generally affluent Christian minority.⁵⁷ No such reports, however, of mistreatment by Islamists towards Christians have been found to date.

List of Attachments

1. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Syria*, October 26.
2. 'Roman Catholicism in Syria' updated 25 August 2009, Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_Syria – Accessed 3 March 2010.
3. Kjeilen, T. (undated), 'Melkite Greek Catholic Church' *LookLex Encyclopaedia* <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/melkite.htm> – Accessed 4 March 2010.
4. Roberson. R.G (ed). (undated), 'Eastern Catholic Churches 2008' Catholic Near East Welfare Association website, source: *Annuario Pontificio* <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat08.pdf> – Accessed 4 March 2010.
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