

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide information about Allawis.**
- 2. Please provide information about violence between Allawis and Sunni Muslims in Lebanon, especially Tripoli.**
- 3. Was there a flare up in May 2008?**
- 4. Were there any serious problems from 2005 – April 2008?**
- 5. Please provide information about Hizb Al Arabi Al Democrati. Is it only open to Allawis?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information about Allawis.**

Note: Other versions of the term “Allawi” include Alawi, Alawite, Allawite. “Alawite” is used in this response, although alternative spellings in sources have not been altered.

Despite the media spotlight on the Tripoli conflict, few in-depth reports were found on Lebanese Alawites themselves. The most recent and detailed is an August 2008 *Mideast Monitor* article, which is included in this response as Attachment 1. This article provides background information on Lebanese Alawites, their relations with the Syrian regime, the main Alawite political party – Arab Democratic Party (ADP) and its associated Alawite militia – the situation since the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, events in 2008, and the uncertain future of Alawites in Lebanon. The article states that “the position of Lebanon’s tiny Alawite community has never been more precarious” (Yazbeck, R. 2008, ‘Return of the Pink Panthers?’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 1).

March 2008 advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) states that finding information on the situation of Lebanese Alawites is difficult. DFAT states that “[i]t is a closed and secretive community” (DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/23 – Lebanon: Hizb al Arabi al Demokrati and Alawi Muslims – CIS Request No.LBN9260*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 March 2008), 17 March – Attachment 2).

Question 1 of *Research Response LBN31663*, dated 3 May 2007, provides background information on Alawites (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response LBN31663*, 3 May – Attachment 3).

Previous research responses on Alawite/Sunni violence in Tripoli

- *Research Response LBN34104*, of 9 December 2008, provides the most recent updated information on the 2008 clashes between Syrian-backed Alawites and Sunni groups in the Jebel Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh suburbs of Tripoli (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN34104*, 9 December – Attachment 4).
- Questions 3 and 4 of *Research Response LBN33578* provide information on the conflict between Alawite and Sunni militias in Tripoli up to August 2008, and on the power or influence of the Alawite community in Tripoli (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33578*, 2 September – Attachment 5).
- *Research Response LBN33419*, of June 2008, provides background to the outbreak of violence between Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli, and detailed reports of incidents of violence to date (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response LBN33419*, 27 June – Attachment 6).

2. Please provide information about violence between Allawis and Sunni Muslims in Lebanon, especially Tripoli.

Past research responses provide detailed information on violence between Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli, especially during and following the May 2008 unrest. These past responses are listed above. A reconciliation agreement was signed in September 2008 and the situation seems to have calmed somewhat since then. Articles in *The Daily Star* (13 March 2009) and *NOW Lebanon* (22 April 2009) state that clashes have continued sporadically since the peak of the fighting last year. A few incidents of violence have been reported in 2009, including gun battles in April and May between the Alawite enclave of Jabal Mohsen and the neighbouring Sunni majority area of Bab al-Tebbaneh. Most of the fighting last year took place in this area, although several bombing incidents, apparently targeting the Lebanese Army, occurred in Tripoli’s city centre. Although the media reported local fears that large-scale violence may reignite leading up to and during the June 2009 general elections, polling was reported to have been largely incident free. A May 2009 article in *The National* reported that the Lebanese Army “now keeps the two sides apart by putting its soldiers in the line of fire between the two neighbourhoods”. Most recently, on 13 August 2009 it was reported that a bomb explosion had occurred in Jabal Mohsen. According to the press reportage, the blast occurred near the house of Alawite politician, Rifaat Eid, described as head of the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) (‘Blast wounds three in north Lebanon’ 2009, *Reuters India*, 13 August <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-41735120090813> – Accessed 19

August 2009 – Attachment 7; 'One Killed, Four Wounded in Armed Clashes in Bab Al-Tabbaneh' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: *Daily Star*, 14 March – Attachment 8; 'Violence-filled Tuesday across Lebanon' 2009, *NOW Lebanon*, 22 April <http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=89872#> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 9; Prothero, M. 2009, 'Fighting in Tripoli leaves both sides sorry', *The National*, 21 May <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090522/FOREIGN/705219833/1192> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 10; Abdel-Latif, O. 2009, 'Premiership in play', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 950, 4-11 June <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/950/re6.htm> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 11; 'Hundreds of thousands head for polling stations in north' 2009, *Daily Star*, 8 June http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=102771 – Accessed 7 August 2009 – Attachment 12).

Reports of violence in 2009

On 13 August 2009 Hezbollah television station *Al-Manar* reported on an explosion in Jabal Mohsen, wounding three people:

An explosive charge went off this morning near the house of Rif'at Id, head of the Arab Democratic Party, in Jabal Muhsin area, wounding three people, including a 10-year-old child who sustained serious wounds.

In the details of the incident, the explosive charge was connected to a detonator placed in a gas container near a vehicle maintenance shop next to the house of Id, causing material damage inside the shop and wounding a number of citizens.

Commenting on the explosion, Id held a news conference in which he accused unknown parties of working to disturb the security situation between Jabal Muhsin and Al-Tabbanah. He called on the security authorities to provide protection to the residents of Jabal Muhsin and Al-Tabbanah ('Explosion injures three in north Lebanon – more' 2009, *BBC Monitoring*, source: *Al-Manar*, 13 August – Attachment 13).

On 13 August 2009 *Reuters* reported the same incident:

A small bomb in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli wounded three people on Thursday, including a boy who sustained serious injuries, residents and local officials said.

The blast struck in Tripoli's Jabal Mohsen district, home to the predominantly Sunni Muslim city's Alawite minority. It went off near the house of Rifat Ali Eid, a leading Alawite politician. The army deployed in the area ('Blast wounds three in north Lebanon' 2009, *Reuters India*, 13 August <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-41735120090813> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 7).

On 25 May 2009, *NOW Lebanon* reported that "gunfire over successive days in mid-May between the frequently hostile neighborhoods [Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh] left two injured":

Rifaat Eid, whose father Ali leads both the Arab Democratic Party and the Alawi community of Tripoli's Jabal Mohsen neighborhood – an area with a tradition of violence dating back to the civil war – told *NOW* he is certain there will be more clashes with his Sunni neighbors in Bab al-Tabbaneh. In fact, gunfire over successive days in mid-May between the frequently hostile neighborhoods left two injured, Eid and a security source said (Nash, M. 2009, 'Pre-

election violence expected to continue but remain isolated', *NOW Lebanon*, 23 May – Attachment 14).

On 22 April 2009, *NOW Lebanon* reported that clashes had resumed “in the violence-prone area of Bab al-Tabbaneh”.

Clashes resumed Tuesday in the violence-prone area of Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli. Heavy gunfire was heard on Miatayn Street, a main thoroughfare in the city, and the ISF deployed to contain the situation. Clashes have sporadically occurred in the city between the mostly Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the predominantly Alawi Jabal Mohsen on and off since a major flare-up of fighting over the summer ('Violence-filled Tuesday across Lebanon' 2009, *NOW Lebanon*, 22 April <http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=89872#> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 9).

13 March 2009 *Daily Star* reported on armed clashes between rival families in Bab al-Tabbaneh:

Lebanon was this week swept by a wave of kidnappings and clan violence that threatened to revive factional fighting after months of relative calm. One person was killed in a police raid in northern Lebanon on Thursday [12 March] after armed clashes broke out between two families in the impoverished Bab al-Tabbaneh neighbourhood of Tripoli. Four people were wounded in a gun battle between the Awad and Mifleh families, according to local media reports. The Internal Security Forces cordoned off the area as they searched for suspects.

Long-standing tension between Bab al-Tabbaneh's majority Sunnis and Alawite residents on the nearby Jabal Mohsen erupted into bloody fighting last May and has continued sporadically, displacing thousands of residents. Tensions between the two religious communities have simmered since the end of Lebanon's 1975-1990 Civil War ('One Killed, Four Wounded in Armed Clashes in Bab Al-Tabbaneh' 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: *Daily Star*, 14 March – Attachment 8).

June 2009 elections

A number of pre-election articles reported local fears of violence reigniting over the election period. According to an article in *The Daily Star* the day after the polling, the elections in the north were largely calm, apart from one person injured in a “scuffle” between supporters of rival candidates in Bab al-Tabbaneh ('Hundreds of thousands head for polling stations in north' 2009, *Daily Star*, 8 June http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=102771 – Accessed 7 August 2009 – Attachment 12).

In an article in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, dated 4-11 June 2009, Omayma Abdel-Latif states:

For the past four years, Tripoli has been the scene of sporadic sectarian violence that pitted Bab Al-Tebana, a poverty stricken Sunni dominated neighbourhood, against Jebel Mehsen, an Alawi dominated residential area. With election fever reaching boiling point, there are strong concerns over a possible eruption of violence during – and perhaps after – elections day (Abdel-Latif, O. 2009, 'Premiership in play', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 950, 4-11 June <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/950/re6.htm> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 11).

A 21 May 2009 article in *The National* reports fears that the lead-up to the elections would reignite the violence in Tripoli (Prothero, M. 2009, 'Fighting in Tripoli leaves both sides sorry', *The National*, 21 May <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090522/FOREIGN/705219833/1192> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 10).

A 23 May 2009 article in *The National* describes the importance of Tripoli in the elections:

Tripoli will play a key role in the aftermath of the Lebanese elections as it is a traditional seat of Sunni power and generally decides the prime minister – which is why the three big contestants are spending a lot of money in its impoverished streets.

...Although neither the leader of the largest Sunni party, the Future Movement's Saad Hariri, nor the current prime minister, Fouad Siniora, are from Tripoli, it is a traditional seat of Sunni power. "You cannot be leader of the Sunnis without support in Tripoli," said Khodor Talib, a political analyst for the respected daily *As-Safir* (Fielding-Smith, A. 2009, 'Battleground of the billionaires', *The National*, 23 May <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090523/WEEKENDER/705229835/-1/NEWS> – Accessed 7 August 2009 – Attachment 15).

For more detailed information on violence between Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli, see previous research responses listed in Question 1.

3. Was there a flare up in May 2008?

An International Crisis Group (ICG) report describes how in May 2008 Lebanon teetered on the brink of civil war as Hezbollah cadres clashed with Future Movement Party supporters. The report details how Hezbollah easily overcame its opponents and took over parts of Beirut, before handing power back to the Lebanese army. There were corresponding clashes in other parts of the country, including in Tripoli. After May 2008 unrest in Tripoli continued to flare periodically (International Crisis Group 2008, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, Middle East Briefing N°23, 15 May – Attachment 16; Schenker, D. 2008, 'Stability in Lebanon Threatened, Again', *PolicyWatch*, no. 1406, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 October <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2932> – Accessed 4 December 2008 – Attachment 17; Karam, Z. 2009, 'City at nexus of Lebanon's volatile politics', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 January <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/01/04/MNNA15142K.DTL> – Accessed 7 August 2009 – Attachment 18).

Previous research responses provide details of the May 2008 clashes and the subsequent unrest in Tripoli. These are listed in Question 1.

4. Were there any serious problems from 2005 – April 2008.

In an *Al-Ahram Weekly* dated 4-11 June 2009, Omayma Abdel-Latif states that: "For the past four years, Tripoli has been the scene of sporadic sectarian violence that pitted Bab Al-Tebana, a poverty stricken Sunni dominated neighbourhood, against Jebel Mehsen, an Alawi dominated residential area" (Abdel-Latif, O. 2009, 'Premiership in play', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 950, 4-11 June <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/950/re6.htm> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 11).

In his report on the situation for Lebanese Alawites, Riad Yazbeck states that the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005 "left many Alawites acutely aware of their insecurity...the city was now overwhelmingly Sunni and seethed with Salafi fundamentalist

movements deeply hostile to Alawites”. Yazbeck describes the sporadic outbreaks of violence in Tripoli since 2005. In January 2007 “Sunni and Alawite militiamen clashed in the city, leaving two people dead.” The violence escalated after May 2008 and, according to an August 2009 *Reuters* article, more than 20 people were killed in clashes between Jabal Mohsen and Bab Tebbaneh last year (Yazbeck, R. 2008, ‘Return of the Pink Panthers?’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 1; ‘Blast wounds three in north Lebanon’ 2009, *Reuters India*, 13 August <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-41735120090813> – Accessed 19 August 2009 – Attachment 7).

5. Please provide information about Hizb Al Arabi Al Democrati. Is it only open to Allawis?

According to DFAT, ‘Hizb al Arab al Democrati’ is the Arab Democratic Party (ADP). Although the ADP is mentioned in passing in recent media articles, little in-depth information was found on the party. Most sources describe the ADP as predominantly Alawite, although no information was found to indicate that it is only open to Alawites. In his August 2008 article on Lebanese Alawites Riad Yazbeck states that when the ADP was formed in the 1970s, the party was “ostensibly non-sectarian and nominally led by the polished Sunni lawyer Nassib Khatib”. According to Yazbeck the “ADP was really led by Ali Eid and other Lebanese Alawites close to [Syrian president] Hafez Assad’s brother, Rifaat”. Following the end of the civil war, Yazbeck states that the ADP “went into political eclipse”, but more recently, “the ADP is back on the scene in Tripoli”. According to Yazbeck the ADP is now led by Ali Eid’s son, Rifaat Eid. However, a May 2009 *NOW Lebanon* article states that “Rifaat Eid[’s]...father Ali leads both the Arab Democratic Party and the Alawi community of Tripoli’s Jabal Mohsen neighbourhood”. *The Europa World Yearbook 2008* has the following brief information: “[T]he Arab Democratic Party (or the Red Knights; Alawites; pro-Syrian; Leader Ali EID) are based in Tripoli” (DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/23 – Lebanon: Hizb al Arabi al Democrati and Alawi Muslims – CIS Request No.LBN9260*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 March 2008), 17 March – Attachment 2; Yazbeck, R. 2008, ‘Return of the Pink Panthers?’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 1; Nash, M. 2009, ‘Pre-election violence expected to continue but remain isolated’, *NOW Lebanon*, 23 May – Attachment 14; ‘Lebanon: Political Organizations’ 2008, *Europa World Yearbook 2008*, 49th ed., Routledge, London, p. 2779 – Attachment 19).

Riad Yazbeck provides the following background information on the ADP:

After the outbreak of civil war in 1975 and the entry of Syrian troops into Lebanon a year later, the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) was founded. Although ostensibly non-sectarian and nominally led by the polished Sunni lawyer Nassib Khatib, the ADP was really led by Ali Eid and other Lebanese Alawites close to Hafez Assad’s brother, Rifaat.

As the conflict between the Assad regime and the (Sunni) Muslim Brotherhood ripped Syria apart in the late 1970s, tensions between Sunnis and Alawites in Tripoli boiled over repeatedly, especially between the Alawite neighborhood of Jabal Muhsin and the adjacent Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tibbaneh, a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism. In 1981, the ADP formed a militia called the Arab Knights, popularly known as the “Pink Panthers” (due

to the ravages of improper laundering on their trademark red fatigues). The ADP functioned largely as an adjunct of the Syrian army, operating in areas where Syrian troops were not (yet) deployed – in particular, West Beirut and Tripoli.

In Tripoli, the Pink Panthers and other Syria-backed militias struggled for supremacy against the radical Sunni Islamist *Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami* (Islamic Unification Movement). Both sides committed horrendous atrocities that are vividly remembered today. After Syria's capture of the city in 1985, the ADP enjoyed free reign.

After the war ended with Syrian forces fully in control of Lebanon (apart from the Israeli occupied zone in south Lebanon), Alawites were given two seats in the 128-member parliament. However, the ADP went into political eclipse as Rifaat Assad had fallen from grace in Syria. Syrian officials in charge of the "Lebanon file" shifted their support to other Alawite leaders who had not incurred the animosity of Sunnis, such as wealthy Tripoli businessman Ahmad Hbous, who won election to parliament in 1996 and 2000.

...After the Syrian Withdrawal

The departure of Syrian forces from Lebanon left many Alawites acutely aware of their insecurity. Due to the exodus of Christians from Tripoli during Tawhid's reign of terror in the early 1980s, the city was now overwhelmingly Sunni and seethed with Salafi fundamentalist movements deeply hostile to Alawites. Because both of the community's parliamentary seats are in majority Sunni districts, they were easily captured in the May-June 2005 elections by two marginal Alawites picked by Saad Hariri's Sunni-led Future Movement, Badr Wannus and Mustafa Hussein. On top of feeling disenfranchised politically, most Alawites remained desperately poor. Jabal Muhsin is one of the most impoverished areas of the country, with adult unemployment reaching as high as 60% and, according to UNICEF, a school dropout rate of about 80%.

The vast majority of Alawites have sided with Lebanon's mainly Shiite and Christian opposition bloc against the Sunni dominated March 14 coalition. In the face of growing sectarian and political polarization in Lebanon, it became virtually impossible for any Alawite public figure to defy this consensus. Even MP Hussein eventually withdrew from Hariri's Future Movement last year and joined the opposition. He accused March 14 of subjecting Lebanon to American "tutelage," while visiting Damascus and warmly praising Assad.

The ADP is back on the scene in Tripoli, now led by Eid's son, Rifaat (who has apparently severed relations with his exiled Syrian namesake and supports Syrian President Bashar Assad). As Lebanon's political crisis deepened and security conditions deteriorated, the ADP steadily built up a militia, presumably with help from the Syrians (Yazbeck, R. 2008, 'Return of the Pink Panthers?', *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 1).

In March 2008 DFAT provided the following brief information on the ADP, stating that "[m]embership is by association and seems to be fairly widespread among Alawites, though it is difficult to verify this":

The Arab Democratic Party (ADP), or 'Hizb al Arab al Democrati', is not represented in Parliament. It is a predominantly Alawite political party allied with the pro-Syrian opposition. ADP does not maintain member lists, nor are there membership fees or cards. Membership is by association and seems to be fairly widespread among Alawites, though it is difficult to verify this.

5. Most Alawites live in the north of Lebanon, in the Akkar region and in a small area of Tripoli (approximately four square kilometres) called Jabal Mohsen. Most other residents of Tripoli are Sunni and aligned with the anti-Syrian Future Movement (DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/23 – Lebanon: Hizb al Arabi al Demokrati and Alawi Muslims – CIS Request No.LBN9260*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 March 2008), 17 March – Attachment 2).

An article in *The Daily Star* dated 22 May 2009 states that: “Residents of Jabal Mohsen are typically Alawites, pro-Syrian, and close to the Arab Democratic Party. Those of Bab al-Tabbaneh are mostly Sunni, favoring the anti-Syrian March 14th alliance, and they tend to support the Future Movement” (Malo, S. 2009, ‘From bullets to paint brushes in Bab al-Tabbaneh’, *Daily Star*, 22 May – Attachment 20).

Although dated, DFAT advice from 2004 provides some background information on the ADP (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2004, *DFAT Report 272 – Lebanon: RRT Information Request: LBN16296*, 19 January – Attachment 21).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <http://www.google.com>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

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

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Yazbeck, R. 2008, ‘Return of the Pink Panthers?’, *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 2, August http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0808/0808_2.htm – Accessed 22 August 2008.
2. DIAC Country Information Service 2008, *Country Information Report No. 08/23 – Lebanon: Hizb al Arabi al Demokrati and Alawi Muslims – CIS Request No.LBN9260*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 14 March 2008), 17 March. (CISNET Lebanon CX195581)
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13. 'Explosion injures three in north Lebanon – more' 2009, *BBC Monitoring*, source: *Al-Manar*, 13 August. (FACTIVA)
14. Nash, M. 2009, 'Pre-election violence expected to continue but remain isolated', *NOW Lebanon*, 23 May. (CISNET Lebanon CX226807)
15. Fielding-Smith, A. 2009, 'Battleground of the billionaires', *The National*, 23 May <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090523/WEEKENDER/705229835/-1/NEWS> – Accessed 7 August 2009.
16. International Crisis Group 2008, *Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, Middle East Briefing N°23, 15 May.
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20. Malo, S. 2009, 'From bullets to paint brushes in Bab al-Tabbaneh', *Daily Star*, 22 May. (FACTIVA)
21. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2004, *DFAT Report 272 – Lebanon: RRT Information Request: LBN16296*, 19 January.