



Kuwait: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 14 October 2009

Recent information on the treatment of Bidoon in Kuwait

Section 2d of the *United States Department of State* 2008 Human Rights Report for Kuwait, under the heading 'Stateless Persons', reports:

“According to Refugees International, citizenship is derived entirely from the father; children born to citizen mothers and non-national fathers do not inherit citizenship unless the mother is divorced or widowed. The law further fails to provide non-nationals, including Bidoon and non-Muslims, the opportunity to gain nationality on a nondiscriminatory basis.

Although the exact number of Bidoon residents was unknown, the Ministry of Planning estimated there were more than 100,000 Bidoon in the country at the end of 2006. The government continued to discriminate against the Bidoon in areas such as education, employment, medical care, and freedom of movement. Bidoon children may not attend public schools. Although the government accepted Bidoon in an increasing number of government positions, it barred Bidoon from enlisting in the armed forces. Bidoon generally did not qualify for the subsidized health care that citizens received, and the government also made it difficult for Bidoon to obtain official documents necessary for employment or travel, such as birth certificates, civil identification cards, driving licenses, and marriage certificates.

The government continued to grant citizenship to a small number of Bidoon. During the year it granted citizenship to 573 Bidoon on the basis of sufficient ties to the country; however, more than 80,000 citizenship requests were pending at year's end. Many Bidoon were unable to provide documentation proving sufficient ties to the country or present evidence of their original nationality, as they were truly stateless. However, the government maintained that the vast majority of Bidoon were concealing their true identities.” (United States Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, & Labor) (25 February 2009) *2008 Human Rights Report: Kuwait*)

Under the heading 'Profile', the *Minority Rights Group International* World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, in its 'Bidoun' section of 'Middle East, Kuwait', states:

“Bidoun means 'without' and connotes those whose legal status is unclear, who are undocumented and may effectively be stateless. Whilst the Kuwaiti Government claims that most the Bidouns are concealing their nationalities out of deceit, the Kuwaiti bureaucracy was quite lax about requiring documentation before 1986 and many Bidouns actually worked in the government machinery

(especially armed forces), studied at schools, were treated in the healthcare system and travelled freely before the tightening up of ID requirements by the Government. Some Bidouns therefore 'missed out' on the opportunity of become citizens by not applying in the 1950s-1960s for registration or may have travelled for work to Kuwait without passports from their countries of origin before its independence in 1959 and remained." (Minority Rights Group International (2005) *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*)

Section 20.04 of the February 2008 *UK Home Office COI Report for Kuwait*, under the heading 'Ethnic Groups: Kuwait', states:

"In 1985 the government began applying provisions of Alien Residence Law 17/1959 to the Bidun and issued a series of regulations stripping the Bidun of almost all their previous rights and benefits. In 1986 the government severely restricted Bidun's eligibility for travel documents. It also fired government employees not employed by the army or the police who could not produce valid passports, whether issued by Kuwait or another country, and instructed private employers to do the same. In 1987 the government began refusing to issue Bidun new or renewal driver's licenses or register their cars, and began ending public education for Bidun children and instructing private schools to require valid residency permits. In 1988 the ban on public education was extended to the university, and Kuwaiti clubs and associations were instructed to dismiss their Bidun members. Also beginning in 1988, statistical data on Bidun in the government's Annual Statistical Abstract was transferred from the Kuwaiti category to alien population categories." (UK Home Office (18 February 2008) *Country of Origin Information Report: Kuwait*)

An October 2009 *Agence France Presse* news report states:

"Kuwaiti deputies on Sunday called for a special parliamentary debate to resolve the humanitarian issue of thousands of stateless Arabs in the country, MP Faisal al-Duwaisan said.

The lawmaker told reporters that 24 MPs out of the 50-member house signed the request to hold a special session on December 10 to coincide with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Known locally as bidoons, stateless Arabs number between 70,000, according to the government, and about 120,000, according to human rights bodies and activists.

"These people have been suffering as they are deprived of their basic human rights like education, medical treatment and obtaining identification papers including birth, marriage and divorce certificates," Duwaisan said.

He said the bidoon issue is also negatively affecting Kuwait's reputation abroad. "We should resolve this issue and close this file permanently," he added."

(Agence France Presse (04 October 2009) *Kuwiati MPs demand special debate on stateless rights*)

Another *Agence France Presse* news article from July 2008 reports:

“Bidoon, from the Arabic "bidoon jinsiya" meaning without nationality, describes a stateless people of certain bedouin tribes whose members have not been granted citizenship in their home countries.

The plight of the bidoon in Kuwait, which number 70,000 according to the government and up to 120,000 according to rights activists, has received most recognition.

They have no right to work, obtain a birth certificate for their babies or even get their marriage certificate attested.” (Agence France Presse (26 July 2008) *Still no place to call home for Arab bidoon*)

References:

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted:

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European Country of Origin Information Network
Freedom House
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Human Rights Watch
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