



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Jordan

Jordan – JOR37981 – Proselytising – Born Again Christians – Baptists

14 January 2011

1. What is the current situation and treatment of Born Again Christians in Jordan?

The Jordanian government accepts evangelicals into the country to administer religious instruction to its adherents, and continues to believe in and promote religious tolerance, but will not allow Evangelical groups to proselytise.¹

In Jordan there are up to 10,000 followers of Evangelical churches. Evangelical churches had been set up in the early 20th century by missionaries.² In 2006 it was reported that Jordan contained 20 Jordanian Baptist churches with approximately 1,350 members and anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 from other Christian denominations that attend these Baptist churches.³ The Baptist Church has had a presence and operated in Jordan since 1951 and established a school in Ajloun in 1952 and a larger school in the capital Amman in 1972.⁴

The Constitution treats Muslims and non-Muslims differently – each group has their own tribunal for recourse under the law. According to the constitution, matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are the jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. Personal status issues include religion, marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. The government adheres strictly to Shari'a law which prohibits a Muslim converting to another faith. Within Christian groups, matters of personal status fall under the jurisdiction of the Tribunals of Religious Communities. In cases involving people from different religious groups, the civil court has jurisdiction, unless the non-Muslim grants the Shari'a court jurisdiction. Unlike the traditional Churches (Greek Orthodox, Coptic, Catholic and Armenian) which operate lawfully under the Tribunals of Religious Communities,⁵ the Evangelical churches like Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are not recognised by either the government of Jordan for purposes of the Constitution or TRC, but adherents are able to meet and practice their faith.⁶

¹ 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# - Accessed 12 January 2011. Attachment 1

² 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# - Accessed 12 January 2011. Attachment 1

³ Kirkland, D. 2006, 'Baptists in Jordan: 'An incredible success story'', *The Baptist Courier* website 31 October <http://www.baptistcourier.com/965.article> - Accessed 6 January 2011 Attachment 11

⁴ Kirkland, D. 2006, 'Baptists in Jordan: 'An incredible success story'', *The Baptist Courier* website 31 October <http://www.baptistcourier.com/965.article> - Accessed 6 January 2011. Attachment 11

⁵ The Library of Jordan, *The Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, January 1, 1952* 'The Judiciary' Articles 97-119, http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constitution_jo.html - Accessed 12 January 2011. Attachment 2

⁶ 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# - Accessed 12 January 2011. Attachment 1

In January 2009, the Jordanian cabinet officially recognised the Council of Church Leaders which is the government reference point for all Christian affairs. The council consists of the heads of the 13 officially recognised Christian churches in the country and serves as an administrative body to facilitate official Christian matters. Evangelical Christian denominations, despite not having full membership on the council, must also conduct business with the government through the council.⁷

In February 2008, the Jordanian government expelled 27 foreign Evangelical preachers from the country. The government, with the support of Jordan's Council of Churches – the highest Christian body in Jordan and which represents the traditional Churches – explained that the deportation occurred because of the open proselytising conducted by these 27 individuals, which had the potential to ignite violent reactions from residents committed to their own faith.⁸ The government permitted four of the Evangelicals to return to the country later in 2008.⁹

Through 2007 and 2008, the Jordan government closed down two Evangelical churches; one in the port city of Aqaba and the other in the Jordan Valley. These churches were operated by the mission group Arab World Ministries (AWM).¹⁰

Later in 2008 the Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU) held a 3 day conference in Jordan's capital of Amman.¹¹ Allowing this conference to take place after the expulsion of Evangelists earlier in the year may indicate that the government continues to believe in and promote religious tolerance, but will not allow Evangelical groups to proselytise.¹² No reports were located after 2008 that indicate that any further expulsions or deportations of Born Again Christians have occurred.

In September 2007 Jordan King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein met with the President of the Baptist World Alliance to discuss issues in relation to events in the Middle East and the building of a Baptist Church at Bethany beyond Jordan (the location where John the Baptist baptised Jesus), on the Jordan river. The church and centre was completed and opened in March 2009 with the attendance of the King of Jordan and the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.¹³

⁷ US Department of State 2010, International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148826.htm - Accessed 7 January 2011 Attachment 5

⁸ Bos, S.J. and Leijenaar, E. 'Jordan Admits Deporting Foreign Christians For Preaching And Mission Work' 2008 Bosnewslife website, 21 February <http://www.bosnewslife.com/3452-3452-news-alert-jordan-admits-deporting-foreign> - Accessed 12 January 2011. Attachment 3 and Dr. Megalommatitis, M.S. 2008, 'Are Evangelicals triggering Islamic Radicalization in Jordan?' *American Chronicle* website, March 23. <http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/view/56198#> - Accessed 12 January 2011 Attachment 4

⁹ US Department of State 2010, International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148826.htm - Accessed 7 January 2011 Attachment 5

¹⁰ Bosnewslife website, 21 February <http://www.bosnewslife.com/3452-3452-news-alert-jordan-admits-deporting-foreign> - Accessed 12 January 2011 Attachment 3

¹¹ 'Christian leaders get an inside view of the Middle Eastern Church's struggle' 2008 *Come and See, The Christian website from Nazareth* 24 October.

<http://www.comeandsee.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=942#> - Accessed 12 January 2011 Attachment 6

¹² 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# - Accessed 12 January 2011. Attachment 1

¹³ 'More than 120 Baptists baptized in Jordan' 2009. *Baptist World Alliance* website 23 March http://www.bwanet.org/bwa.php?m=news&p=news_item&id=86# - Accessed 7 January 2011. Attachment 13

2. What are the authorities' attitude towards and the availability of State protection for Born Again Christians in Jordan?

No reports could be located that would indicate that state protection would be withheld or was not available to a Born Again Christian or other Evangelists. Sources indicate that as long as a Born Again Christian or other Evangelists refrain from proselytising, the authorities will not hinder their ministry and their work with Evangelical Christian followers although the Government does not recognise Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Church of Christ, but each is allowed to conduct religious services without interference.¹⁴

In July 2006 Jordan implemented Article 18 of the *United Nations International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*. The *ICCPR* guarantees everyone the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, even though such freedoms may be subject to limitations prescribed by law, to protect public order.¹⁵ This may indicate that the Kingdom is progressively broadening and raising its level of religious tolerance.

Nevertheless, the government is under pressure to deny Evangelical groups and Born Again Christians permission to set up churches and missionary schools in the country. A substantial amount of this pressure is emanating from the traditional churches that view the Evangelical groups and Born Again Christians as a threat to the established stable relationship of coexistence that exists between the Christian and Islamic faiths. For the traditional Churches, the arrival of new Western Christian denominations who believe in the right to openly proselytise among Christians and Muslims could ignite violent reactions from residents committed to their faith. Additionally, they are also fearful that some in their congregations may defect to the Evangelists' teachings and practices.¹⁶

3. Deleted.

4. Deleted.

5. Is there a Baptist Church in Ajloun, North Jordan, and, if not, where is the nearest Baptist Church?

Yes, there is a Baptist Church in Ajloun, which is located in northern Jordan. The Jordan Baptist Convention operate the church, a school (for children aged from kindergarten to Year 9) for both Christian and Muslim students, a convention centre which serves all the Evangelical churches in Jordan for retreats, training and youth and Sunday School activities.¹⁷

¹⁴ Smith, J.A 2006 'Jordan Baptists offer expansive ministry in Arab world' - *Florida Baptist Witness* 13 November <http://www.gofbw.com/news.asp?ID=6670#> - Accessed 13 January 2011 Attachment 7

¹⁵ 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# - Accessed 12 January 2011 Attachment 1

¹⁶ 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# - Accessed 12 January 2011 Attachment 1

¹⁷ Abbassi, N. 2010 'New state' has been a place of refuge since days of the early church', *The Alabama Baptist online*, 5 August. http://thealabamabaptist.org/print-edition-article-detail.php?id_art=16550&pricat_art=8# - Accessed 11 January 2011 Attachment 14

6. Deleted.

Attachments

1. 'Born Again Problems' 2008, *Jordan Business Magazine* http://www.jordan-business.net/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=40# – Accessed 12 January 2011.
2. The Library of Jordan, *The Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, January 1, 1952* 'The Judiciary' Articles 97-119, http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constitution_jo.html – Accessed 12 January 2011.
3. Bos, S.J. and Leijenaar, E.'Jordan Admits Deporting Foreign Christians For Preaching And Mission Work' 2008 Bosnewslife website, 21 February <http://www.bosnewslife.com/3452-3452-news-alert-jordan-admits-deporting-foreign> – Accessed 12 January 2011.
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5. US Department of State 2010, International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148826.htm – Accessed 7 January 2011
6. 'Christian leaders get an inside view of the Middle Eastern Church's struggle' 2008 *Come and See, The Christian website from Nazareth* 24 October. <http://www.comeandsee.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=942#> – Accessed 12 January 2011
7. Smith, J.A 2006 'Jordan Baptists offer expansive ministry in Arab world' – *Florida Baptist Witness* 13 November <http://www.gofbw.com/news.asp?ID=6670#> – Accessed 13 January 2011.
8. Deleted.
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11. Kirkland, D. 2006, 'Baptists in Jordan: 'An incredible success story'', *The Baptist Courier* website 31 October <http://www.baptistcourier.com/965.article> – Accessed 6 January 2011.
12. 'Google maps Australia website. http://maps.google.com.au/maps?f=d&source=s_d&saddr=Irbid,+Jordan&daddr=Husn,+Jordan&hl=en&geocode=FaKa8AEdASMjAilTBKxtkXYcFTGCfR_YE-EWVA%3BFetm7wEdm3cfAikFy5ZGJGEcFTE42PqWoljvwiw&mra=ls&sll=32.545442,35.857153&sspn=0.030316,0.055017&g=Irbid,+Jordan&ie=UTF8&z=11 – Accessed 7 January 2011
13. 'More than 120 Baptists baptized in Jordan' 2009. *Baptist World Alliance* website 23 March http://www.bwanet.org/bwa.php?m=news&p=news_item&id=86# – Accessed 7 January 2011.
14. Abbassi, N. 2010 'New state' has been a place of refuge since days of the early church', *The Alabama Baptist online*, 5 August. http://thealabamabaptist.org/print-edition-article-detail.php?id_art=16550&pricat_art=8# – Accessed 11 January 2011.
15. Crest Community Baptist Church, Sydney website homepage <http://www.crestbaptistchurch.com.au/index.html> – Accessed 22 December 2010.
16. The Library of Jordan, *The Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, January 1, 1952* 'The State and System of Government' Articles 2, http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constitution_jo.html - Accessed 12 January 2011.