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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN
FOR THE 45TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The purpose of this report is to discuss the status of human rights in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Jordan) for the 45th session of the Universal Periodic Review.

Background

2. Jordan is located in the Middle East and has a population of eleven million people.¹ The country is predominantly Muslim with 97.1% of the population identifying as Muslim, 2.1% as Christian, 0.4% as Buddhist, 0.1% as Hindu, and less than .01% as Jewish, other, or none.² In its 2023 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Jordan as the 49th worst country for Christians to live in.³ This ranking stems from the fact that Christian churches that are not part of the Orthodox or Roman Catholic Church are persecuted because they are more publicly open about sharing their faith.⁴

3. Jordan's last review was held on November 8, 2018.⁵ As a result of the review, Jordan accepted 149 of 226 recommendations.⁶ Jordan supported Belarus' recommendation that the government should "[c]ontinue the policy of maintaining an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for religious diversity."⁷ Additionally, Jordan supported Pakistan's recommendation that Jordan "[s]trengthen punishment for perpetrators of trafficking crimes, in particular when the victim is a child or a woman, to contribute to their protection."⁸

Legal Framework

Religious Persecution

4. Article 2 of Jordan's Constitution establishes that "Islam is the religion of the State and Arabic is its official language."⁹ Article 6 of the Constitution states that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion."¹⁰

5. The Constitution also prescribes the use of Sharia Courts in certain cases. As stated in Article 105 of the Constitution:

The Sharia Courts alone shall have the jurisdiction - in accordance with their own laws - in the following matters:

1. Matters of personal status of Moslems.¹¹

6. Under Article 273 of Jordan’s Penal Code, “[w]hoever dares to publicly scorn or curse any of the pro[phe]ts, he/she shall be punished by imprisonment from one to three years.”¹² Moreover, under Article 278 of the Penal Code:

Whoever commits one of the following acts, he/she shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not to exceed three months or a fine not to exceed twenty dinars (JD20):

1. Publishes any print, writing, picture or effigy calculated or tending to outrage the religious feelings or belief of other persons, or;
2. Utters in a public place and in the hearing of another person any word or sound calculated or tending to outrage the religious feelings or belief of such person.¹³

7. Formally, the government only officially recognizes the following churches: Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, the Armenian Apostolic, the Coptic Orthodox Churches, Greek, Maronite, the Roman Catholic Churches, the Syriac Church of the East, Anglican, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and Seventh Day Adventist.¹⁴ Further, the government recognizes several other denominations as just a society.¹⁵ These include the Baptist, Free Evangelical, Nazarene, Assemblies of God, and Alliance churches.¹⁶

8. Jordan is also a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and has a responsibility to protect the rights enshrined in it.¹⁷ Articles 18 and 27 of the ICCPR enshrine religious freedom:

Article 18

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹⁸

Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.¹⁹

Human Trafficking

9. Article 3 paragraph A of Jordan’s 2009 Anti-Human Trafficking Law defines human trafficking as follows:

1. Transporting, moving, lodging, or receiving of people for the purpose of abusing them, whether through using or threatening of use of force, or through any form of coercion, abduction, fraud, deceit, abuse of power, abuse of vulnerability, or through giving or receiving financial gifts or any other privileges to secure the consent of a person who has control over those people; or

2. Transporting, moving, lodging, or receiving of people who are under the age of 18 for the purpose of abusing them, whether through using or threatening of use of force, or through any of the means stated in item (1) of this paragraph.²⁰

10. Further, under Article 8 of this law, “[a] person [who] commits any of the crimes provided for under item (1) of paragraph (A), Article (3) of this Law shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a period of not less than six months or to a fine of an amount not less than JD1000 and not more than JD5000 or to both penalties.”²¹

11. Additionally, under Article 8 of the ICCPR, “[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”²²

12. Jordan is also a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.²³ Under Article 9, Section 1 of this Protocol:

1. States Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:

(a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and

(b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.²⁴

Religious Persecution

13. In Jordan, Christians face persecution in the workplace, from family, and even from the government.²⁵ In particular, Christians from Muslim backgrounds are ostracized and are even at risk of being violently attacked by family members. Additionally, Christians who live out their faith publicly are at risk of being interrogated and harassed by government authorities.²⁶ Further, Jordan only officially recognizes twelve Christian religious organizations.²⁷ Because of this, Christians belonging to non-recognized Christian groups, particularly evangelicals, are persecuted as they tend to be more outspoken and public about sharing their faith.²⁸

14. We are extremely concerned about Jordan’s laws that criminalize speaking out or publishing material that might “outrage the religious feelings or belief” of others²⁹ or “publicly scorn[ing] or curse[ing] any of the pro[phe]ts.”³⁰ With Islam as the state religion, these types of blasphemy laws are common in Muslim-majority countries and have resulted in significant human rights violations. Criticizing Islam or sharing beliefs contrary to Islam can be viewed as blasphemy. Christians professing that Jesus Christ is the only way to achieve salvation could be charged under this law because it may “outrage the religious feelings or beliefs” of a

Muslim. Further, Christians who are active in ministering to converts have been physically and mentally abused, often by family members of individuals who have converted from Islam to Christianity.³¹

15. Individuals who convert to Christianity from Islam face the brunt of persecution in Jordan both at workplace and from family members.³² Further, Christian converts are interrogated by government officials,³³ and the government maintains a permissive attitude towards threats and violence against converts.³⁴ In fact, in 2021, several converts who had a Muslim background were interrogated for days.³⁵ One man even had to tell his family about his Christian faith and was then beaten with a metal chair and stones, which resulted in broken ribs and liver damage.³⁶ Additionally, church leaders are “interviewed” by intelligence agents and pressured to tell on other Christians, particularly on Christians who help converts from Islam.³⁷

16. For example, the pastor of Amman International Church in Jordan reported that suspected intelligence agents visited his church and attended Bible studies because the government suspected that the pastor was engaged in proselytizing.³⁸ The church’s youth pastor was even denied re-entry into Jordan at the Israeli-Jordan border.³⁹

17. Christians even face abuse and harassment when simply trying to go about their lives. Christian women in particular have been sexually harassed simply because they do not wear a hijab. In fact, in 2021, an estimated 100 Christian women were sexually harassed because of this.⁴⁰ Even more troubling, Christian women who have converted from Islam have been quickly married off to Muslim men to preserve the family’s honor and suppress their Christian faith.⁴¹ In more rural areas of Jordan, these women are even at risk for honor killings,⁴² which is when family members kill their own daughters, sisters, or wives because they have harmed the family’s honor.⁴³

18. In addition to being denied legal standing by the government of Jordan, evangelical groups are also discriminated against by the Orthodox Church which has actively campaigned against the legal recognition of these groups.⁴⁴ In January 2021, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop sent a letter to Jordan’s Judicial Council, stating that “[t]here are great dangers from the teachings and ideas that are disseminated by these groups that are being spread within the Christian society” and that “these groups are funded from abroad and have outside and unclear agendas and we have reservations about them.”⁴⁵

19. Further, Jordan’s reliance on Sharia law for family matters is extremely discriminatory against Christians and non-Muslims. For example, Christian families face difficulties adopting children because they are forbidden from adopting non-Christians.⁴⁶ This is further hampered by the fact that orphaned newborns adopt the religion of the state, which is Islam.⁴⁷ Sharia law is also discriminatory against Christian and non-Muslim women in the case of marriages.⁴⁸ Under Sharia law, Muslim men are freely permitted to marry non-Muslim women, so long as the women belong to a monotheistic religion.⁴⁹ However, non-Muslim men are expressly prohibited from marrying Muslim women. This infringes on the right of individuals to freely choose their spouse and enter into a marriage.

Human Trafficking

20. Human trafficking victims in Jordan are largely migrant workers that have been exploited from South and Southeast Asia, East Africa, Egypt, and Syria.⁵⁰ Men are often exploited for use in forced labor, and women are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.⁵¹

21. One of the biggest factors hindering Jordan's efforts to effectively combat human trafficking is a lack of protection for victims and witnesses.⁵² The protection measures lack the resources and funding necessary to protect victims and witnesses of human trafficking.⁵³ Further, victims of human trafficking have even been arrested and deported for acts committed as a direct result of the individual being trafficked.⁵⁴

22. In 2022, Jordan launched the national referral mechanism (NRM) as well as appointed forty-one special prosecutors and judges to focus on human trafficking.⁵⁵ These new efforts had an immediate impact on Jordan's ability to combat human trafficking. In 2022, Jordan identified 131 victims of human trafficking and 152 perpetrators.⁵⁶ This is a notable increase from 2021 when the government only identified sixty-one human trafficking victims and seventy-two perpetrators.⁵⁷

23. The outbreak of the Tigray War in Ethiopia has led to many Ethiopian women falling victim to sex trafficking in a desperate attempt to flee the violence in Ethiopia.⁵⁸ In fact, more than thirty Ethiopian women have been trafficked to Israel through Jordan in the first few months of 2023 alone.⁵⁹ These women, who are desperate to flee the violence in Ethiopia, are tricked by promises of employment but instead are subjected to beatings, sexual abuse, and inhumane living conditions.⁶⁰

24. For example, during the outbreak of the Tigray War in 2020, an Ethiopian woman fled to Jordan on a two-year housemaid contract.⁶¹ When she arrived in Jordan, her papers and belongings were taken away, and she was told that the family she was going to work for owned her.⁶² For eighteen months, she was forced to work fifteen to twenty hours a day and was beaten for not working fast enough.⁶³ When she was able to sleep, it was on a dirty mattress in a shed, and she was only allowed to eat bread and yogurt twice a day.⁶⁴ Her health suffered significantly; and when the family was done with her, she was brought to a man who assaulted her for multiple days.⁶⁵ When he was done with her, he left her in the middle of nowhere at night.⁶⁶ She was found the next morning by a man who told her she was in Jerusalem and directed her to a refugee center belonging to an Ethiopian church.⁶⁷

25. Another Ethiopian woman started a two-year contract to work in Jordan, and it began with hard work, but she had the freedom to leave.⁶⁸ However, once the Tigray War began, her employers stopped paying her and began beating her whenever she asked to eat or rest.⁶⁹ The mother of the house where she was working took the woman to her sister's house to clean and even allowed her sister's son to rape the woman.⁷⁰ The woman began to get sick; and when she was not getting better, a driver took her to a building where men told her they were taking her to a "safe" place where they raped her and then abandoned her.⁷¹

26. A woman from Uganda moved to Jordan hoping to improve her life and start her education but became a domestic worker for the owner of a recruitment agency where she was abused for two and a half years.⁷² Her employers refused to pay her, forced her to work long hours without any breaks, beat and insulted her, and withheld her passport from her.⁷³ One day she gained access to a cell phone and was able to call a friend who then told her about a

women's shelter.⁷⁴ After receiving the information and help she needed from the shelter, she developed a plan to escape and fled in a taxi one day when she was taking out the trash.⁷⁵ When she arrived at the shelter, she was finally safe.⁷⁶ Her case was then referred to the public prosecutor and for five months she was kept in a shelter where she received legal assistance, health care, psychological support, clothing, and food.⁷⁷

27. In another example, three girls between the ages of twelve and thirteen were trafficked to Jordan from Iraq.⁷⁸ One of the girls was sold to a human trafficker by her parents.⁷⁹ The other two girls were promised jobs.⁸⁰ Once they arrived in Jordan, the girls were forced into sexual exploitation.⁸¹ One day, one of the girls was injured as a result of a forced sexual encounter and was sent to the hospital.⁸² It was at this point that Jordan's Combatting Human Trafficking Unit was alerted and was able to rescue the remaining two girls.⁸³ The three girls were then referred to one of the Jordanian Women's Union's shelters.⁸⁴ All three girls were then later returned to their home in Iraq.⁸⁵

Recommendation

28. In accordance with its international commitments, Jordan must protect the rights of Christians to freely practice and share their faith. Further, individuals must be able to freely adopt a religion of their choice without being harassed by the government, society, or family members. We also ask that Jordan permit religious groups, such as evangelical denominations, to be able to register with the government and be granted legal status. This is a critical step to ensure that Christians can freely practice the tenets of their faith.

29. Jordan's recent steps to combat human trafficking are commendable and these steps have shown immediate improvement in Jordan's ability to identify victims and perpetrators. We encourage Jordan to continue these efforts as they are making an immediate impact. Additionally, Jordan must allocate resources and training for investigators and prosecutors so that they can effectively identify victims of human trafficking, investigate the crimes, and effectively prosecute the perpetrators.

¹ Jordan, THE WORLD FACTBOOK, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/> (July 3, 2023).

² *Id.*

³ Jordan, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/jordan/> (last visited July 6, 2023).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Universal Periodic Review - Jordan*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/jo-index> (last visited July 6, 2023).

⁶ *Jordan Infographic 31st*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session31/JO/infographic_Jordan.pdf (last visited July 6, 2023).

⁷ OHCHR, UPR of Jordan (3rd Cycle – 31st Session): Thematic List of Recommendations, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session31/JO/UPR31_Jordan_ThematicListofRecommendations_E.docx (last visited July 6, 2023).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ CONSTITUTION OF THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN 1952 (amended 2011), art. 2, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Jordan_2011.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.* art. 6.

¹¹ *Id.* art. 105.

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- ¹² THE PENAL CODE FOR THE YEAR 1960 [PENAL CODE] art. 273 (Jordan), <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text/515535>.
- ¹³ *Id.* art. 278.
- ¹⁴ OPEN DOORS, JORDAN: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 19 (2021), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/Full-Country-Dossier-Jordan-2022.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ *Id.*
- ¹⁶ *Id.*
- ¹⁷ *Ratification Status for Jordan*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=88&Lang=EN (last visited July 6, 2023).
- ¹⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].
- ¹⁹ *Id.* art. 27.
- ²⁰ Anti-Human Trafficking Law for the Year 2009 (No. 9/2009), art. 3 (Jordan), http://www.ahtnc.org.jo/sites/default/files/anti-human_trafficking_law.pdf.
- ²¹ *Id.* art. 8.
- ²² ICCPR art.8, *supra* note 18.
- ²³ *Chapter XVIII Penal Matters: 12. a Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, UNITED NATIONS TREATY COLLECTION, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18 (July 6, 2023, 9:15 AM).
- ²⁴ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9, § 1, *adopted* on Nov. 15, 2000, 2237 U.N.T.S. 319, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.
- ²⁵ OPEN DOOR, *supra* note 14, at 7.
- ²⁶ *Id.* at 7, 26
- ²⁷ *Id.* at 19.
- ²⁸ *Jordan*, *supra* note 3.
- ²⁹ PENAL CODE art. 278 (Jordan).
- ³⁰ *Id.* art. 273.
- ³¹ OPEN DOORS, JORDAN: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 34 (2023), <https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Jordan-2023.pdf>.
- ³² OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 14, at 24, 28.
- ³³ *Id.* at 35.
- ³⁴ Georgia L. Gilholy, *An Uncertain Future for Jordan's Christians*, AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED IRELAND, <https://www.acnireland.org/journal/2021/5/11/an-uncertain-future-for-jordans-christians> (last visited July 6, 2023).
- ³⁵ OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 14, at 35.
- ³⁶ *Id.*
- ³⁷ *Id.*
- ³⁸ Jayson Casper, *A Royal Pickle: Jordanian Evangelicals and American 'Help'*, RELIGION UNPLUGGED (Feb. 14, 2019), <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2019/2/14/a-royal-pickle-jordanian-evangelicals-and-american-help>.
- ³⁹ *Id.*
- ⁴⁰ OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 14, at 7
- ⁴¹ *Id.* at 34.
- ⁴² *Id.*
- ⁴³ William Christou, *Killing of Women and Children by Family Members Increase by 94% in Jordan for 2022: Report*, THE NEW ARAB (Jan. 10, 2023), <https://www.newarab.com/news/familial-homicide-jordan-94-2022-report>.
- ⁴⁴ Daoud Kuttab – RNS, *Jordan's Orthodox Archbishop Moves to Deny Evangelicals Full Legal Recognition*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Feb. 17, 2021, 11:33 AM), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/february/jordan-christians-evangelicals-courts-archbishop-atallah.html>.
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⁴⁶ *Jordanian Christians Call for Broader Religious Education, Rights to Adopt*, LA PRENSA LATINA (Feb. 28, 2023), <https://www.laprensalatina.com/jordanian-christians-call-for-broader-religious-education-rights-to-adopt/>.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Kersten Knipp, *Interfaith Marriages Still a Rarity in the Muslim World*, DW (Sept. 11, 2019), <https://www.dw.com/en/interfaith-marriages-still-a-rarity-in-the-muslim-world/a-50391076>.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ Eliza Kirk, *Combating Human Trafficking in Jordan*, THE BORGAN PROJECT (Mar. 24, 2021), <https://borgenproject.org/human-trafficking-in-jordan/>.

⁵¹ GLOB. INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNAT'L ORGANIZED CRIME, ORGANISED CRIME INDEX: JORDAN 3 (2021), https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/english/ocindex_profile_jordan.pdf.

⁵² *Id.* at 5.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ Mays Ibrahim Mustafa, *131 Human Trafficking Victims Reported in 2022 – Labour Ministry*, THE JORDAN TIMES (Jan. 17, 2023), <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/131-human-trafficking-victims-reported-2022-%E2%80%94-labour-ministry>.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Hadar Gil-Ad, *Ethiopian Women Fleeing War Fall Prey to Human Trafficking in Jordan, End Up in Israel*, YNETNEWS (Mar. 5, 2023, 8:35 AM), <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/syhjx3zjh>.

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⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Survivors of Human Trafficking Leading the Way: Sarah's Story*, UNFPA JORDAN (Aug. 1, 2021), <https://jordan.unfpa.org/en/news/survivors-human-trafficking-leading-way-sarahs-story>.

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Trafficked, Rescued and Given Another Chance*, UNFPA JORDAN (July 30, 2020).

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⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.*