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**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
51ST SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN
FOR THE 51ST 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. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Sultanate of Oman (Oman) for the 51st session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Oman is a country located on the Arabian Peninsula and has a population of approximately 5.3 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Muslim, with 85.9% identifying as Muslim, 6.5% as Christian, 5.5% as Hindu, 0.8% as Buddhist, and 1.3% as other.² In its 2025 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Oman as the 32nd worst country for Christians.³ This ranking stems from the fact that Christian churches are forced to register with the government and their meetings are monitored to determine if any Omani nationals attend.⁴

3. Oman's last review was held on January 21, 2021.⁵ As a result of the review, Oman received 264 recommendations, 208 of which it supported.⁶ It was recommended by Indonesia, and supported by Oman, that the government “[c]ontinue to strengthen tolerance of and coexistence in the religious and cultural diversity of the people and facilitate space for expression in its education system and civil life in general.”⁷ It was also recommended by Australia, and supported by Oman, that the government “[r]atify and fully implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”⁸ In our last UPR on Oman, we expressed concern over the persecution of Christians and Oman's laws that criminalize any act disparaging Islam and promoting other religions.

Legal Framework

4. Article 2 of the Constitution of Oman states that “[t]he religion of the State is Islam and Islamic Sharia is the basis for legislation.”⁹ Article 28 claims to protect religious freedom.

¹ Jill Ann Crystal et al., *Oman*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Oman> (last updated July 11, 2025).

² *Id.*

³ *Oman*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/oman/> (last visited July 11, 2025).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Universal Periodic Review – Oman*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/om-index> (last visited July 11, 2025).

⁶ *Infographic – Oman*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/OMAN_Infographic_37th.pdf (last visited July 11, 2025).

⁷ *UPR of Oman (3rd Cycle – 37th Session): Thematic List of Recommendations*, OHCHR 33, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Matrice-Recommendations-Oman.docx> (last visited July 11, 2025).

⁸ *Id.* at 1.

⁹ CONST. OF OMAN 1996 (rev. 2011) art. 2, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Oman_2011.

It states that “[t]he freedom to practice religious rites according to recognised customs is protected, provided it does not violate the public order or contradict morals.”¹⁰

5. However, Articles 270-272 of the Penal Code prohibits various acts that oppose or disparage the “pillars upon which the religion of Islam is based, or promoting or calling for another.”¹¹

Article 270

Whoever, establishes, founds, organises, or manages a group, association, authority, organisation, or a branch thereof, aimed at opposing or disparaging the pillars upon which the religion of Islam is based, or promoting or calling for another shall be punished by imprisonment for a period no less than (3) three years and not exceeding (7) seven years.

Whoever joins any of those bodies, participates in them, or assists them by any means, with knowledge of their objectives, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period no less than (6) six months and not exceeding (3) three years.¹²

Article 271

Whoever calls or participates in the preparation of a meeting with the purpose of opposing or disparaging the pillars upon which the religion of Islam is based, or calling for another religion shall be punished by imprisonment for a period no less than a year and not exceeding (3) three years.¹³

Article 272

Whoever obtains or possesses, with the intention of publishing or promoting, documents, publications, or recordings, or any other effects, containing an opposition or disparagement of the pillars upon which the religion of Islam is based, or containing a call to another, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period no less than (6) six months and not exceeding (3) three years, and a fine no less than (100) one hundred Rial Omani and not exceeding (500) five hundred Rial Omani, or one of those two punishments.

Whoever obtains or possesses, using any means of publication, recording, or broadcast designated for promoting thought, an association, an authority, or an organisation aimed at one of the purposes stipulated in the preceding Paragraph, with knowledge thereof, shall be punished by the same punishment.¹⁴

6. Additionally, under the Ministerial Decision No. 287, even private schools are obligated to teach students Islamic studies.¹⁵

¹⁰ *Id.* art. 28.

¹¹ The Penal Law Promulgated by Royal Decree 7/2018 art. 270, https://oman.om/docs/default-source/default-document-library/omani-penal-law.pdf?sfvrsn=64250c36_2.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* art. 271.

¹⁴ *Id.* art. 272.

¹⁵ *Oman: Non-State Actors in Education*, UNESCO, https://education-profiles.org/northern-africa-and-western-asia/oman/~non-state-actors-in-education?utm_source=chatgpt.com (last updated Jan. 7, 2022, 6:25 PM).

7. While Oman is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),¹⁶ it does have an obligation to uphold the rights established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Under Article 18 of the UDHR:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.¹⁷

8. Additionally, Oman is a party to the Arab Charter on Human Rights.¹⁸ Under Article 30 of the Arab Charter of Human Rights:

1. Every person shall have the right to freedom of thought, belief and religion, which may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law.

2. Freedom to manifest or practice one's religion or beliefs or to perform rituals, either individually or in community with others, shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a tolerant society that respects freedoms and human rights, to protect public safety, public order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

3. Parents and legal guardians are guaranteed the freedom to ensure the religious and moral education of their children.¹⁹

Religious Persecution

9. In our last report on Oman, we urged the government to repeal or reform its laws that criminalize actions that go against Islam or promote another religion. While Oman claims to support religious freedom, it puts barriers on the ability for people to practice their faith if they belong to a minority religion. Since Oman's last UPR, more Christians than usual have been expelled from the country.²⁰

10. One way in which the government restricts religious freedom is by restricting where Christians are allowed to practice their faith. In Oman, Christians are only permitted to have religious gatherings in government approved places of worship, specifically on land that was donated by the Sultan for the express purpose of carrying out religious gatherings.²¹ Currently, the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs (MERA) only recognizes the Catholic Church in Oman, the

¹⁶ *Ratification Status for Oman*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=130&Lang=EN (last visited July 11, 2025).

¹⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217 (III) A art. 18 (Dec. 10, 1948).

¹⁸ Royal Decree 16/2023 Approving the Accession of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, <https://decree.om/2023/rd20230016/>.

¹⁹ Arab Charter on Human Rights 2004 art. 30, https://www.eods.eu/template/default/compendium/Part%209/006_Arab_Charter_on_Human_Rights.pdf.

²⁰ Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Christians Are Squeezed Like Never Before in the Middle East and North Africa*, CHRISTIAN DAILY INT'L (Jan. 22, 2025, 4:00 PM), <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/christians-are-squeezed-like-never-before-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

²¹ *Oman*, AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED (2023), <https://acninternational.org/religiousfreedomreport/reports/country/2023/oman>.

Protestant Church of Oman, and the Al-Amana Center, which is a Protestant organization promoting interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims.²² However, there are not enough legal places of worship to serve the number of Christians in the country.²³ For example, there are only four Catholic parishes in the country that serve an estimated 55,000 Catholics.²⁴

11. Another way in which the government restricts religious freedom is by prohibiting the sharing of a non-Muslim faith with a Muslim. The Penal Code of Oman effectively criminalizes activity that promotes another religion. Christians in Oman are so concerned that simply living out their faith may be seen as proselytizing that Christian churches do not display religious symbols such as crosses even on the designated land to avoid making them visible to people outside of the compound.²⁵ Additionally, the distribution of religious materials and Bibles must only be done in recognized places of worship, otherwise it is considered an act of proselytism.²⁶ Baptisms can also be risky because it is viewed as a sign that Christians are sharing their faith with non-Christians.²⁷ Churches are very hesitant about baptizing converts²⁸ because Christian gatherings are regularly monitored.²⁹

12. In state schools, Islamic instruction is compulsory, and children cannot be exempt.³⁰ Further, the Ministry of Education prohibits any material that contradicts the religion of Islam.³¹ This effectively means that Children are not even allowed to access books that promote and discuss other religions. While there are private schools in Oman that offer alternative religious courses, these schools are very expensive and largely inaccessible for many Christians.³² Additionally, in these private schools, they are still required to teach Islamic studies.³³ Oman’s restriction on religious education is a clear violation of Article 30 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which states that “[p]arents and legal guardians are guaranteed the freedom to ensure the religious and moral education of their children.”³⁴

13. While Oman is not a party to the ICCPR, it did accede to the Arab Charter on Human Rights in 2023.³⁵ The Arab Charter on Human Rights guarantees the right for everyone to “practice one’s religion or beliefs or to perform rituals, either individually or in community with others.”³⁶ This right is likewise enshrined in the UDHR with similar language. Restricting Christians from building places of worship, operating schools, and sharing their faith with others, are clear violations of the fundamental human right of religious freedom. While Oman is party to numerous international instruments that have enshrined the right to religious freedom, the government has taken no action to protect the rights that it claims to support. In fact, not only

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Oman: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT’L / WORLD WATCH RSCH. 17 (Jan. 2025), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Oman-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

²⁶ *Id.* at 18.

²⁷ *Id.* at 15.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 16.

³⁰ *Id.* at 15.

³¹ *Non-State Actors in Education*, *supra* note 15.

³² *Oman: Persecution Dynamics*, *supra* note 25, at 15.

³³ *Oman: Non-State Actors in Education*, *supra* note 15.

³⁴ Arab Charter on Human Rights, *supra* note 19.

³⁵ Royal Decree 16/2023 Approving the Accession of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, *supra* note 18.

³⁶ Arab Charter on Human Rights, *supra* note 19.

has Oman not protected the right to religious freedom, but it has actively created legislation that violates the fundamental right to religious freedom.

Recommendations

14. Oman must take immediate action to guarantee religious freedom for all its citizens. To do this, Oman must reform its laws to allow for Christians to practice and share their faith. It must allow Christians to build and operate their own places of worship and schools. Additionally, we ask that Oman take immediate steps to ratify the ICCPR and begin protecting the rights enshrined in it.