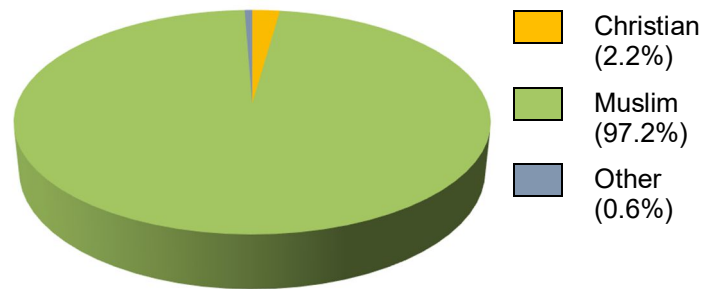


JORDAN



Area:	Population:	Political system:	Major Language(s):
22,100 km ²	7.9 million	Monarchy	Arabic

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Kingdom of Jordan was established by the British government in 1922. The country has been ruled since its establishment by members of the Hashemite dynasty from Mecca. The Jordanian rulers claim to be direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. From 1948 until 1967 Jordan controlled East Jerusalem and the West Bank until Israel conquered the territories. Many Palestinian refugees already came to the Kingdom after the establishment of Israel. Nowadays the majority of its citizens are of Palestinian origin. Only a minority belong to the traditional Bedouin inhabitants of the area. In 1994 Jordan made a peace treaty with Israel. The peace treaty confirms the Jordanian King's rights as custodian of the Holy Places in East Jerusalem. Coexistence of Sunni Muslims and Christians is usually peaceful. The Christian community praises the Royal family for fostering the spirit of tolerance and coexistence. The Catholic Church is present with parishes and institutions like Caritas Jordan. There are Christian and Hindu migrant workers mainly from Asia living and working temporarily in the country.

According to article 2 of the country's constitution¹ from 1952 "Islam is the religion of State". Article 6 says that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion." Article 14 obliges the State to "safeguard the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites in accordance with the customs observed in the Kingdom, unless such is inconsistent with public order or morality." Article 28e says that "no person shall ascend the Throne unless he is a Moslem." Article 99 establishes civil and religious courts. Article 104 divides them into *Shari'a* courts and tribunals of other religious communities. All personal status affairs of Muslims are regulated by *Shari'a* law. Christians are subjected to their respective church tribunals. Civil marriage does not exist. A Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man. If a Christian woman converts to Islam her Christian husband has to convert too.

The constitution and law do not explicitly ban Muslims from converting to another faith, and there are no penalties under civil law for doing so. Nonetheless, by according primacy to *Shari'a*, which prohibits Muslims from converting to another religion, the government effectively prohibits both conversion from Islam and proselytization of Muslims.² According to Islamic law, there are consequences when Muslims adopt religions other than Islam. For instance, if someone is convicted of apostasy, the Islamic courts adjudicating matters of personal status have the power to void the person's marriage and deny his or her right to inherit from a spouse and from Muslim

relatives. A person could also be subjected to accusations of apostasy with all its consequences for activities other than conversion.

Jordan explicitly criminalises blasphemy. Article 273 of Jordan's Penal Code of 1960 punishes any individual who insults the Prophet Mohammed with a term of imprisonment of one to three years.³

Christians are represented by quota in Parliament and have access to higher ranks in the government and the army.

Incidents

In September 2014 King Abdullah welcomed Christian refugees from Iraq who fled from Daesh (ISIS) to Jordan. The local Catholic Church praised the King for this gesture. "Our King has provisionally offered to accept some 500 Christian families from Iraq. If all goes well, about 1,500 further families will follow," Father Khalil Jaar told Aid to the Church in Need.⁴

In October 2014 the new St Garabed Armenian Church was consecrated in Jordan, on the bank of the Jordan River. This was announced by the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The land on which the church stands, not far from the place traditionally referred to as the site of Jesus' baptism, reports the patriarchal statement, was donated by King Abdullah II of Jordan, as were the sites of other churches built on the bank of the Jordan.⁵

In October 2014 King Abdullah II said that Christians gave their own contribution to the building of Arab civilization. This is why the forced displacement of indigenous Christian communities in the Middle East is a serious problem, which must be curbed in any way possible. This is what the king said in his talks with the President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, who visited Jordan.⁶

In February 2015 Daesh militants released a video showing a captured Jordanian pilot being burnt alive in a cage, a killing that shocked the world. Jordan, which has been mounting air raids in Syria as part of the U.S. led alliance against Daesh insurgents, retaliated with air strikes. Jordanian state television said that the pilot had been killed on 3rd January.⁷

In February 2015 Jordan executed two al Qaeda prisoners, following through on a promised strong response to the Daesh killing of pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh. Put to death were Sajida al-Rishawi, the Iraqi would-be suicide bomber whose release Daesh had previously requested, and Ziad Karbouli, a former top aide to the deceased leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.⁸ Father Rifat Bader, a spokesman of the Catholic Church in Jordan, defended the executions as an act of self-defence in the face of war and terrorism.⁹

In February 2015 the Jordanian Minister for Religious Affairs, Hayel Dawoud said that the activities of the terrorist organisation Daesh "have nothing to do with Islam, and the satirical cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed have nothing to do with Christianity, while the Zionist policies carried out by the settlers have nothing to do with the Jewish religion."¹⁰

In August 2015 Queen Rania of Jordan said that moderate Muslims were not doing enough to combat the evil ideology of Daesh, and she asked the international community to pay greater attention to young people, before the Middle East is devastated.¹¹

In September 2015 before the opening of an International Conference in Paris, Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh explained that the title of the summit originally focused on the protection of religious and ethnic minorities. It was then modified to focus attention on the necessary protection of victims of ethnic and religious violence, without referring to the category of minority. Nasser Judeh also pointed out that in Jordan one does not use the term "minority" to indicate the components of the Jordanian population who profess and follow religions other than Sunni Islam.¹²

In September 2015 Jordanian Prince Hassan said that Christianity began in the Middle East, it is not a product of western import, and has given a major contribution to the development of Arab culture and the Arab-Islamic civilisation. For this reason the presence of Christians in the Middle

East must be safeguarded through instruments and measures that ensures them human protection. The Prince said this during his intervention in Acre, Israel, on the occasion of the presentation of a book on the historical events of Arab Christians in the Middle East.¹³

In December 2015 King Abdullah II stressed that Arab Christians “are an integral part of our past, present and future” and right from the beginning “have been an essential partner in building our culture and civilisation and in defending Islam”. This is what the monarch said in a televised speech on Jordan state television, in which the Hashemite King expressed his delight to congratulate Jordanians who celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (celebrated in almost all the world on 23rd December) and the Christian solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord. In this context, the Monarch reiterated that all Jordanians “live under the umbrella of equal citizenship that binds us together,” and that since the great battle of Mu’tah, (when Mohammad had ordered Islamic forces in the fight against the Byzantine army not to harm the Christians of Syria) Arab Christians have been an essential partner in building our culture and civilisation and in defending Islam.”¹⁴

Christmas 2015 also marked the fortieth anniversary of the standardisation of the date on which all the Churches and Christian communities in Jordan celebrate Christmas. In 1975, the heads of Christian Churches agreed to celebrate Christmas on 25th December, according to the Gregorian calendar, while Easter is celebrated by all Christians according to the Julian calendar. Jordan is currently the only Country in the world where the two main Christian feasts are celebrated together by all the baptised. In Jordan, Christmas has been a national holiday since 1999, the year King Abdullah ascended the throne.¹⁵

The Islamic holiday of Mawlid al-Nabi, the birth of the Prophet Mohammad – which depends on the lunar calendar – was celebrated on 23rd December 2015. The last time the Islamic and the Christian Christmas celebration coincided was 457 years ago. In February 2016 the site of Jesus’ baptism on the Jordan River was officially declared a World Heritage Site by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The ceremony was attended by a delegation from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, including the Jordanian Minister for Tourism Nayef H Al-Fayez and Archbishop Maroun Lahham, Patriarchal Vicar for Jordan of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.¹⁶

In March 2016 a Daesh cell was routed in Irbid. The jihadists were planning attacks against civilian and military targets, to destabilise national security. In the operation seven terrorists and a Jordanian soldier were killed and five others were injured. 13 people, who were linked in various ways to the extremist cell, were arrested.¹⁷ Earlier in the month Jordanian soldiers clashed with suspected jihadis on the border with Syria. At least five people were killed in clashes between Jordanian security forces and suspected jihadists in the city of Irbid. Following the conflict, authorities declared a curfew.¹⁸

In May 2016 a meeting between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies concluded with the signing of a joint appeal. The meeting was held on 14th May in the capital of Jordan on the theme “Meeting Current Challenges through Education.” The statement, which was signed by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and Jordanian Prince El Hassan bin Talal, condemns all forms of violence.¹⁹

In May 2016 the Garden of Mercy was inaugurated. The project is dedicated to sustainable agriculture, with 600 olive trees planted on an area of 10,000m². It employs 15 workers, chosen from among the Iraqi refugees and unemployed Jordanians. The project was inaugurated in Amman at the Our Lady of Peace Centre in the presence of Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal of Jerusalem and Archbishop Alberto Ortega Martin, Apostolic Nuncio in Jordan and Iraq. The initiative, funded by Pope Francis with the offerings of the faithful collected at the stand of the City of the Holy See at Expo Milano 2015, is a concrete sign of the pastoral care of the Apostolic See and local Churches towards the people of the Middle East who are overwhelmed by conflicts and forced migration.²⁰

In May 2016, at the initiative of the Visitation of Our Lady parish, construction of a multi-purpose centre has started in Anjara, Jordan. The project, named after Our Lady of Mount, will serve the parish's desperate needs. The project, which is located a few kilometres south of Ajloun, will meet the growing demand for more living space, especially for children. The children are currently staying in the religious community's house as there isn't proper accommodation for them.²¹

Prospects for Religious freedom

Jordan, in common with many other Islamic countries in the Middle East, does not grant full religious freedom to its citizens including the right to convert from Islam to another religion or to have no religion at all. Converts from Islam to Christianity might face considerable social resistance and legal consequences especially in personal status affairs. Despite the lack of freedom of conscience the country enables its Christian citizens to live their faith individually and collectively in freedom. Limits of the churches' activities are preaching the Gospel to Muslims and actively pursuing their conversion. The King and other members of the Royal Family are in favour of coexistence and religious tolerance and have expressed this in words and deeds. The monarch welcomed thousands of Christians from Iraq and Syria to his country. Relations between the traditional, officially registered churches and the government are excellent. Non-registered churches are facing problems though. A matter of concern is the high number of Jordanian Muslims who are in favour of radical Islamic ideas or who have joined jihadist groups in neighbouring Syria.

¹ http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constitution_jo.html

² <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

³ <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/#jordan>

⁴ <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/blog/we-have-lost-everything-iraqi-christians-have-found-refuge-in-jordan/>

⁵ <http://fides.org/en/news/36645->

ASIA_JORDAN_An_Armenian_baptismal_church_consecrated_on_the_banks_of_the_Jordan#.V0ga6PmLSM8

⁶ <http://fides.org/en/news/36661->

ASIA_JORDAN_King_Abdullah_II_to_Armenian_President_Christians_helped_to_build_the_Arab_civilization#.V0gadPmLSM8

⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-killing-idUSKBN0L71XE20150203>

⁸ <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/03/world/isis-captive/>

⁹ <http://www.die-tagespost.de/politik/Exekution-Akt-der-Selbstverteidigung;art315,158318>

¹⁰ <http://fides.org/en/news/37211->

ASIA_JORDAN_Jordanian_Minister_satirical_cartoons_of_the_Prophet_Muhammad_have_nothing_to_do_with_Christianity#.V0gPWfmLSM8

¹¹ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Muslims-are-not-doing-enough-to-fight-the-Islamic-State%2C-says-Queen-Rania-35147.html>

¹² <http://fides.org/en/news/58384->

ASIA_JORDAN_The_Jordanian_proposal_let_us_set_aside_the_term_minority#.V0gNt_mLSM8

¹³ <http://fides.org/en/news/58500->

ASIA_HOLY_LAND_Prince_Hassan_of_Jordan_human_safekeeping_for_Christians_in_the_Middle_East_is_needed#.V0gNqfmLSM8

¹⁴ <http://fides.org/en/news/59097->

ASIA_JORDAN_King_Abdullah_II_Arab_Christians_are_an_integral_part_of_our_civilization#.V0gMF_mLSM8

¹⁵ <http://fides.org/en/news/59000->

ASIA_JORDAN_Christians_of_the_Hashemite_Kingdom_have_been_celebrating_Christmas_together_for_forty_years#.V0gMGvmLSM8

¹⁶ <http://fides.org/en/news/59323->

ASIA_JORDAN_UNESCO_recognizes_the_baptism_site_of_Jesus_as_a_World_Heritage_Site#.V0gKwfmLSM8

¹⁷ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Islamic-State-cell-routed-in-Irbid-36843.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Jordanian-soldiers-clash-with-suspected-jihadis-on-the-border-with-Syria-36832.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.news.va/en/news/jordan-joint-appeal-at-the-end-of-the-meeting-in-a>

²⁰ <http://www.fides.org/en/news/60019->

ASIA_JORDAN_Garden_of_Mercy_inaugurated_in_Amman_humanitarian_project_for_refugees#.V0WtqJ3wCM8

²¹ <http://www.fides.org/en/news/60036->

ASIA_JORDAN_Construction_of_Our_Lady_of_Mount_Center_starts_in_Anjara#.V0WqeJ3wCM8