



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

18 March 2015

From The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

**Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights
prepared pursuant to the review mechanism of the Human Rights Council,
established by GA Resolution 60/251
and by the Human Rights Council in Resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007
for the 23rd session of the UPR (2-13 November, 2015) - *session dates to be confirmed***

Lebanon

Louis De Wit
Counsel for Religious Freedom

Marcel Gillet
Chairman of the Religious Freedom Subcommittee

Contact address: Rue d'Argile 60, 1950 Kraainem, Belgium
Tel.: ++ 32-2-782 00 15 - Fax: ++ 32-2-782 05 92 - E-mail: jwitnesses.be@jw.org
Contact in New-York : Philip Brumley : ++ 845-306-0700

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on Lebanon highlights human rights issues in the past four and half years and Lebanon's failure to implement accepted recommendations during the previous review.

As described below, limitations on the religious freedom of Jehovah's Witnesses that were brought to the attention of the Human Rights Council (HRC) during the first review of Lebanon in 2010 (9th session) persist. Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the government of Lebanon to:

- (1) Legally register Jehovah's Witnesses as a Christian religion, allowing them the right to worship freely as guaranteed by Lebanon's Constitution;
- (2) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to have simple, dignified places of worship where they can meet for worship as they do elsewhere, in congregations of as many as 80 or somewhat more, without interference;
- (3) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to import Bibles and Bible literature used in their weekly program of scriptural education and worship all around the world; and
- (4) Abide by their commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Lebanon, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses is a charity registered in the United Kingdom. It provides support to Jehovah's Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world.
2. Jehovah's Witnesses have been practicing their religion in Lebanon since the 1920's. During the 1930's, they held regular Christian meetings, and imported Bible study aids without hindrance. However, in 1952, the semi-monthly journal *The Watchtower*, published in Switzerland, was banned from entering the country, in any language. In 1956, decision No. 135 issued and signed by the Minister of Information Mr. Mohamad Sabra, confirmed the previous decision No. 1574/1952, which did not specify the issuing party. This decision was based on Article 20 of the Ottoman law on Printed Material issued on 16 July 1909 which states that "*It is forbidden to publish books, letters, articles and pictures that are in contradiction with the general ethics and morals ...*".
3. Further, in 1960, the *Awake!* magazine, published in the United States of America, was banned from entering Lebanon. Paradoxically, Jehovah's Witnesses won a case in Lebanon that recognized their identity as a Christian religious group having the right to hold Christian meetings. The lawsuit was initiated on February 1960 against two persons who attacked and disturbed their religious meetings. A positive ruling was rendered in favour of the Witnesses on

25 August 1960. It relied on decision No. 228 issued on 20 April 1960 by the Governor of Mount Lebanon, Mr. Fawzi Bardawil, granting Jehovah's Witnesses the right to hold religious meetings in the limits of the province of Mount Lebanon. The judgement also referred to a report from the General Security department dated 8 August 1960 stating that there is nothing in their files proving the relationship of Jehovah's Witnesses with Zionism or Communism.

4. On 12 May 1964 the Israel Boycott Office of the League of Arab Nations Secretariat in Damascus issued Recommendation No. 570, effectively banning the worship of Jehovah's Witnesses in all Arab countries. The ban was based on the false charge that Jehovah's Witnesses are inspired by World Zionism. On 27 January 1971 the Lebanese Council of Ministers approved the suggestions of the Ministry of National Economy, Boycott Office of Israel, to ban Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon, based on the same false charge.
5. Jehovah's Witnesses are not and have never been "inspired by International Zionism" which was defined by political analysts and experts as "an ideology and a political movement." Moreover, as a matter of religious doctrine, Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in political activities.
6. An official statement of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses dated 10 May 10 2006 states: "We wish to go on record ... that Jehovah's Witnesses have no relationship with Zionism and we continue to maintain our neutral position toward all political movements and governments." Even the Central Israeli Council for Coordination and Advice clearly denied that any connection exists or has ever existed between Jehovah's Witnesses and Judaism.
7. Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon appealed to the Supreme Court against the 1971 decree. The Supreme Court ruled against Jehovah's Witnesses in November 1996. A subsequent plea to the Supreme Court was submitted in 1997. On 21 January 2010 the Supreme Court issued a unanimous negative verdict stating that there was no ground to reopen that case. Thus, the decree issued in 1971 is still in force.
8. In January 2007 the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses wrote to the Israel Boycott Office in Damascus requesting a meeting to discuss the rescinding of the 1964 Recommendation. An answer was received saying that it was not the proper time to discuss that issue. A similar answer was received to a 2008 letter. Jehovah's Witnesses are still trying to obtain an appointment with the officials in the Israel Boycott Office in Damascus.

II. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE GROUND

9. Lebanon's Constitution recognizes and protects fundamental freedoms and human rights. The Constitution Preamble (Part 1 – Fundamental provisions) states that: "*Lebanon is a parliamentary democratic republic based on respect for public liberties, especially the freedom of opinion and belief, and respect for social justice and equality of rights and duties among all citizens without discrimination.*"
10. These freedoms are detailed in Articles 9 and 13 of the Constitution (freedoms of conscience, religion, opinion, assembly, association). Article 9 states that: "*There shall be absolute freedom of conscience. The state in rendering homage to the God Almighty shall respect all religions and creeds and shall guarantee, under its protection the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It shall also guarantee that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected.*"

11. Moreover, Lebanon is party to the major human rights instruments, which declares its commitment to human rights. Lebanon acceded to the ICCPR on 3 November 1972. The Constitution Preamble underlines that: *“Lebanon is also a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception.”*
12. However, the past decrees issued against Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon prohibits them to import religious literature, publicly share their beliefs, and have Christian meetings for worship in Kingdom Halls (places of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses). Therefore, they are forced to meet in private homes to study the Bible in groups and have limited access to their religious texts. Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon expressed on several occasion their gratitude for the generally reasonable treatment shown by the authorities tolerating their well-known Christian meetings and allowing them to gather peacefully. They are, however, requesting the full enjoyment of their rights in a nondiscriminatory way as enshrined in the Constitution and the international commitments of Lebanon.

III. CONCLUSION

13. Jehovah's Witnesses in Lebanon and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the government of Lebanon to take the necessary steps to:
 1. Legally register Jehovah's Witnesses as a Christian religion, allowing them the right to worship freely as guaranteed by the Lebanon's Constitution;
 2. Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to have simple, dignified places of worship where they can meet for worship as they do elsewhere, in congregations of as many as 80 or somewhat more, without interference;
 3. Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to import Bibles and Bible literature used in their weekly program of scriptural education and worship all around the world; and
 4. Abide by their commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Lebanon, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the ICCPR for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.