

Submission by the Society for Threatened Peoples



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Oman

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Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) is an international human rights organisation which campaigns with and on behalf of threatened and persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, nationalities and indigenous peoples. We stand side by side with the victims of crimes against humanity, identifying the individual perpetrators of such crimes and their accomplices by name. And we have no hesitation in speaking out when victims become perpetrators. Because the principle that inspires all our activities is expressed in the slogan "Not Turning a Blind Eye".

Human Rights Situation in Oman

1. Qaboos bin Said al-Said (74) has ruled since 1970 as an absolute monarch, after having deposed his father from the throne. Since then Qaboos bin Said al-Said has both unified and modernised Oman, the Omanis as well as expatriates see him as a visionary.

Oman's (unwritten) society contract relies on the mutual agreement between Government and population that the Sultan lets his citizen participate on the wealth of the country and in return its citizens are not asking for too many rights. ¹

2. Freedom of expression:

In June 2014, a court in Muscat spoke seven defendants guilty in connection with the protests in Sohar and sentenced them to prison for 5 years because they allegedly used force against representatives of the state.

In October 2011 the authorities changed article 26 of the press- and publications law. Through these changes all publications are prohibited by criminal law that could threaten the internal or external security of the state. The maximum penalty was set to two years' imprisonment and a fine. ²

Qaboos has reprieved many dissidents. They were accused of having defamed the Sultan, participation in unauthorized protests and crime with the aid of information technologies. The release from prison is seen as an attempt to defuse the unrests in the wake of the Arab spring on the entire Arabian Peninsula.

¹ <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21635473-can-peaceful-and-prosperous-nation-stay-way-after-sultan?zid=308&ah=e21d923f9b263c5548d5615da3d30f4d>

² <https://www.amnesty.de/jahresbericht/2012/oman>

According to activists at least 50 dissidents have been sentenced to prison terms of up to 18 months alone in the last year.³

Qaboos does not tolerate criticism and his citizens have very few rights. They cannot hold a public meeting without the government's approval. Anyone who wants to set up a non-governmental organisation of any kind needs a licence. To get it, they have to demonstrate that the organisation is "for legitimate objectives" and not "inimical to the social order". On average, that takes two years – assuming permission is granted at all.

Oman's ruler limited the right to freedom of assembly, even using force to break up peaceful demonstrations, and arresting individuals. Article 26 punishes „any person who sends, by means of telecommunications system, a message that violates public order or public morals“.

In 2012 the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), revised and re-signed its security cooperation agreement. This enables each state party to take legal action against its citizens or other GCC citizens when they are judged to have interfered in the internal affairs of any GCC state.

Both the US and the UK provide economic and military aid to the Sultanate, without questioning and/or criticizing Oman's human rights abuse in 2013. ⁴

3. The coexistence of Religions:

Oman is the only country where the ibadi islam represent the majority of the population. The ibadi school of law is neither Sunni nor Shia and an important sign is its tolerance and openness towards other religions.

In Oman live a variety of followers of different religions – Jews, Christians, Hindus and other small religious minorities. Especially in the cities there are Christian churches and temples for Hindus and Buddhists. Regardless of the community, missionary activities are strictly prohibited. ⁵

4. Ethnic and religious minorities:

Muslims (majority are Ibadis, Sunni and Shia are the minority) 85,9%, Christs 6,5%, Hindus 5,5%, Buddhists 0,8%, Jews <.1, other 1%, not assigned 0.2%

Ethnic groups: Arabs, Baluchis, South Asiens (Indians, Pakistanis, Sri lankis, Bangladeshis), Africans.⁶
Current status of minorities and indigenous peoples: Arabs, Baluchis, Swahili, Bedouins and migrants who came as guest workers, live together in peace. ⁷

5. Christians in Oman:

There are 35.000 Christians living in Oman. But especially the situation for Christian converts with a Muslim background is difficult: they are persecuted in various areas of life by the society and even within their families. Although there have not been any violent cases documented during the reporting period.⁸

³ https://www.unwatched.org/20130328_Meinungsfreiheit_Aktivisten_im_Oman_begnadigt

⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/oman>

⁵ <http://www.oman.de/oman-landeskunde/religion-islam/religioese-toleranz/>

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

⁷ <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce3a22.html>

⁸ <https://www.opendooors.de/verfolgung/laenderprofile/oman/>

5. Women's rights:

Even though the Omani constitution prohibits the discrimination of girls and women, they experience massive discrimination in the family law. Particularly among the topics: divorce, inheritance, custody and guardianship.

In December 2012, the first municipal elections were held in Oman. With over 1400 candidates, including 46 women. They all competed for 192 seats, in the end only 4 women got elected.⁹

In the private economy only 20% of the employees are women and in the public sector is the men share twice as high, but half of the students at the universities of the countries are women. Thus, the Omani women are still in a better position compared to other Arab countries.

Also the concealment for women is not prescribed in Oman, even though it dominates the view of the city. There are all variations encountered: Abajas, loose hair, a simple veil and also the full-face veil – especially in the conservative south, closed to the Yemeni border.¹⁰

⁹ <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/oman>

¹⁰ <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/oman-die-weibliche-seite-arabiens-a-662858.html>