

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

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**Questions**

- 1. Could I please have any recent general information on the treatment of Circassians in Israel?**
- 2. Please provide any information on whether there is any form of conscientious objection or alternative military service for Circassians in Israel.**
- 3. Please provide any information on how refusal to undertake military service is perceived in Israel.**

**RESPONSE**

- 1. Could I please have any recent general information on the treatment of Circassians in Israel?**

Circassians represent a tiny minority of the population, and it is difficult to find general up to date information specifically regarding the treatment of Circassians in Israel. For administrative purposes, Circassians are usually included with the Druze community. According to the US Department of State, in the year 2006 the Israeli Druze community numbered approximately 100,000 and the Circassian community numbered some 3,000. In reports, Circassians are often included with the non-Jewish “Arab minority” population – “Druze, Bedouin, Circassian and otherwise”. Due to the lack of information specifically on Circassians, relevant information on the Druze and “Arab minority” has also been included in this response. In general, the available information indicates that Circassians face the same discrimination and lack of equal rights experienced by other non-Jewish minority groups in Israel, despite their participation in compulsory military service. It should also be noted that, according to a journal article discussing compulsory military service, Circassians and others are treated as second-class soldiers and are posted to low security environments (US

Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – Israel & The Occupied Territories*, March, Section 5 – Attachment 1; for information on compulsory military service, see: Mirsaedi, S. 2007, 'Nationalism, Loyalty and the Exit Strategy in Israel and Iran: Compulsory Military Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', *Policy Challenges*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, April

[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202\\_Final.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202_Final.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 2; for information on discrimination of non-Jewish citizens, see: Algazy, J. 2005, 'Israel's Palestinian citizens', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October – Attachment 3).

### **Relevant background information**

Circassians are Sunni Muslims, originally from the region of the Caucasus. A large diaspora lives in the Middle East, having settled there under the Ottoman empire in the 1800s. When Israel was established the local Circassians (in British Mandate Palestine) sided with the Jewish state which, as one Israeli Circassian interviewee notes, "didn't go down too well with the general Muslim population in the country." Another notes the belief that "the decision to link the destiny of the Circassian community to that of Israel, and their participation in the educational system and the army" has led to discord within the current community. It has also created divisions between the Circassian authorities and the youth of the community. Since the initial decision was made to link the "destiny" of the Circassian community to Israel, Circassian authorities have placed great emphasis on the community's relationship with the state and the importance of compulsory military service. However, a number of sources refer to the fact that Circassians, along with other minority groups, continue to lack equal rights in Israel. In the case of the Druze and Circassian communities, this discrimination combined with mandatory conscription has led to growing frustration being voiced, including by those who have served their time in the army. Along with isolation resulting from the importance placed on preserving their distinct cultural and ethnic identity, Circassians are also isolated from the larger Muslim community because of their positive stance towards the Jewish state, and yet as a Muslim minority they are also isolated from Jewish society (Aisenberg, L. 2005, 'A quiet minority', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 June – Attachment 4; Ashkenazi, E. 2004, 'Some Circassians have had enough discrimination and returned to their homeland in the Caucasus', *Haaretz*, 8 February. Circassian World website

[http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz\\_eng.html](http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz_eng.html) – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 5; Bram, C. 2003, 'Muslim revivalism and the emergence of civic society. A case study of an Israeli-Circassian community', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, March

[http://www.circassianworld.com/CCAS\\_ChenBRAM.pdf](http://www.circassianworld.com/CCAS_ChenBRAM.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 6).

### **Ties to Jewish State**

A 2007 article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* quotes Nabiah Nasser Adin, a spokesman of the heads of the Druze and Circassian community, who reaffirms the groups' ties to the state of Israel, describing it as a "blood pact". However, Adin notes that the Druze and Circassian population do not have "full equality":

The chairman of the forum of the Druze and Circassian authority heads, Nabiah Nasser A-Din, on Thursday criticized the "multi-cultural" Israeli constitution proposed by the Israeli Arab organization Adalah, saying that he finds it unacceptable.

"The state of Israel is Jewish state as well as a democratic state that espouses equality and elections. We invalidate and reject everything that the Adalah organization is requesting," he said.

Adalah recently wrote a proposed constitution classifying the State of Israel as a “bilingual and multicultural” country rather than a Jewish state.

...According to Adin, head of the Kasra Adia municipality, the fate of Druze and Circassians in Israel is intertwined with that of the state. “This is a blood pact, and a pact of the living. We are unwilling to support a substantial alteration to the nature of this state, to which we tied our destinies prior to its establishment,” he said.

“All the members of the forum stand behind me on this issue, but want to see full equality with the Jewish population of the state,” he added. “I hope that the state of Israel will treat us differently, better than it does today” (Stern, Y. 2007, ‘Druze, Circassian forum: Israel should remain a Jewish state’, *Haaretz*, 2 March <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/832304.html> – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 7).

An article in *The Jerusalem Post* provides good background and general information on the Circassian community in Israel. A large section of this article follows:

The Circassians are Sunni Muslims but share neither the Arabic origin nor the cultural background of the larger Islamic community. Although maintaining a distinct ethnic identity, they participate in Israel’s economic and national affairs without assimilating into Jewish or Muslim society.

“The Israeli Circassian population is somewhere around the 3,000 mark. As non-Arab Muslims, this means that we constitute a tiny minority within the Muslim population of the country,” explains the retired schoolteacher and headmaster.

Apart from Kfar Kama, with more than 2,000 residents, some 900 Circassians live in Rihania close to the Lebanese border where, unlike Kfar Kama, they share their village with other minority groups.

Revered for their bravery in battle, Circassians were enticed to Palestine in the 1870s by the Ottomans. The Shapsig Circassians settled in Kfar Kama, and the Abedzahs in Rihania.

Since Circassian men serve in the Israeli army, they sometimes find themselves between a rock and a hard place.

“There aren’t too many imams in this country who are also lieutenant colonels in the IDF reserves,” Gerchad notes with a chuckle.

“Circassians serve in the border and regular police as well as the army, and some of our people live in Jewish cities because that is where they found employment in their professions,” he says.

“The Circassian people are dispersed between many lands. In the Middle East, there are also communities in Jordan and Syria. In the late 1950s those in Israel decided to make a stance with the Jews – which didn’t go down too well with the general Muslim population in the country.”

He admits to being disappointed that young Circassians have to leave home in search of work; but he shrugs his shoulders, lifts his hands skyward, and sighs, “What can one do?”

The largest community in the region is in Syria, with around 70,000. Another 55,000 live in Jordan. As in Israel, Circassian men in Syria and Jordan serve in the army of their country.

Small Circassian communities have developed in far-flung corners of the globe, such as Australia and the Americas. Agile representatives of these dispersed communities meet every August in Rihania for the all-important Circassian Festival, a physical attempt to keep their traditions and culture alive.

The Circassians children attend village junior schools and learn the language of their people. Kfar Kama's offspring continue their education at the Kadoori Jewish high school near the village, while their peers in Rihania have the choice of local Arab or Jewish schools.

The residents of Kfar Kama have distinct European features and coloring. The older women, who sit in small groups under fruit trees in their gardens, dress in traditional garb, while young ladies stroll the immaculately kept village streets in jeans with designer holes and skimpy tops.

...Gerchad recounts that 75 percent of the community pray five times a day, while nearly everybody keeps Ramadan and makes the haj pilgrimage to Mecca (Aisenberg, L. 2005, 'A quiet minority', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 June – Attachment 4).

Although dated, a 1991 article states that "Israel treats its Circassians very well", although the only examples given of this is that Israeli Circassians are permitted to "publish and broadcast in their language" and serve Israel "as an elite border guard":

Israel treats its Circassians very well, permitting them to publish and broadcast in their language. These Circassians have also served Israel as an elite border guard. Nevertheless, this history did not deter the Israelis from seizing the Golan Heights from Syria in the '67 Arab-Israeli war, even though this area was almost exclusively Circassian. Perhaps the Israelis thought that the Circassians would willingly join Israel, but the fighting drove them out and into Damascus, where they still live in restricted neighbourhoods under poor conditions (Colarusso, J. 1991, 'Circassian Repatriation: When Culture is Stronger than Politics', *The World & I*, November, pp. 656-669. Circassian World website <http://www.circassianworld.com/colarusso.html> – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 8).

### **Economic situation/Employment**

According to a number of sources consulted, one of the main employment options open to Circassians appears to be the border and regular police force. Information on the Circassian World website states that as well as employment in the border and regular police force, "[m]unicipal and public services are wide open to the Circassians." However, according to the most recent US Department of State report on human rights, the "Arab sector" are still largely under-represented in the civil service ('The Circassians in Israel' (undated), Circassian World website <http://www.circassianworld.com/Israel.html> – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 9; see also ; US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – Israel & The Occupied Territories*, March, Section 5 – Attachment 1).

It has been noted that despite ongoing pledges to promote equality for the Arab, Druze and Circassian population, these pledges are rarely put into practice. A 2006 article in *The Jerusalem Post* notes that affirmative action laws for government employment, which were passed in 2000, had still not been implemented (Halpern, O. 2006, 'Panel: Gap between Arabs and Jews must be closed', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 January – Attachment 10).

The Circassian community resides in Galilee, in northern Israel. Economically, the Circassian population, like the Arab population, tends to be relatively worse off. A 2006 article notes that poverty is disproportionately prevalent in the North, whilst a 2004 article mentions the

“severe economic crisis” in the main Circassian village of Kafr Kama. According to an article in *The Jerusalem Post*, dated 29 August 2006, the recent conflict with Lebanon had hit the Circassian and Arab communities in the North particularly hard because of their already weak position (Ashkenazi, E. 2004, ‘Some Circassians have had enough discrimination and returned to their homeland in the Caucasus’, *Haaretz*, 8 February. Circassian World website [http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz\\_eng.html](http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz_eng.html) – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 5; Kennemer, D. & Jerolimski, A. 2006, ‘Report: Northern business in shock’, *Jerusalem Post*, 29 August – Attachment 11).

A 2004 article in *The Jerusalem Post* notes that despite the fact that Druze and Circassians serve in the army and “demonstrate unswerving and outstanding loyalty to the state”,

The Druze and Circassian communities are not yet full partners with Israeli Jews – not in representation, wages or allocation of land and water resources. The Beduin whose sons give their lives in defense of our state have not even won recognition of their towns (Rubinstein, A. 2004, ‘The Druze & Jewish soul searching’, *Jerusalem Post*, 22 December – Attachment 12).

An English translation of a 2004 *Haaretz* article, found on the Circassian World website, notes that Circassians in Kafr Kama “face the same problems as all Arab villages: injustice in state budget allocations, water cut-offs in the village, and severe unemployment.” The article details the difficulties faced by those who have been discharged after serving their time in the army, including discrimination in employment, and isolation. The article notes that the village faces “a severe economic crisis”. The relevant sections follow:

The Circassians, whose forefathers were brought to Israel in the 19th century, tend to preserve their heritage. After bringing a teacher of the Circassian language, they rebuilt an old house in their village, Kama in Galilee, to make it into an academic and cultural center for Circassians all over the world. At the same time, they face the same problems as all Arab villages: injustice in state budget allocations, water cut-offs in the village, and severe unemployment.

In Beit Shami in Kama, the Circassians are proud of their most recent accomplishment: the reconstruction of one of the most remarkable buildings in their village, which had been deserted for decades. Beit Shami was built at the end of the 19th century by an affluent family in Kama, located to the east of Nazareth near the village of Tabor.

“Reality dictates how we act. There is a severe economic crisis that obliges us to open up,” says the head of the City Council, Jalal Nafso. “I know that some village residents are not excited about it. One person asked me whether they will transform the village into a zoo. Lots of people want to maintain their privacy, but when there is no other option, there is no other option.”

The Circassians are a small minority that has never integrated. While they are Muslims, they study in Jewish schools and serve in the army. They have their own language, which they preserve, and they feel connected to other Circassians in the world and maintain relations with them. They first meet Jews in high school, much earlier than the Druze, for example. This encounter continues in the army or police, where many serve.

However, this contact declines markedly when they return to Kama in the Lower Galilee, with a population of 2,600 persons, or Rayhaniya in the Upper Galilee, with a population of 110.

Many Israelis know nothing about this small community...

... Shalmon believes that the decision to link the destiny of the Circassian community to that of Israel, and their participation in the educational system and the army, is precisely what has led to discord among them, on questions of culture, language, and identity. The head of City Council, Jalal Nafso, agrees. He says that when he went back to the village after spending years in IDF, he felt abandoned.

He adds, "I went back to the village and ran for head of the City Council. Only then did I realize that I didn't know the truth of our situation. I ask young people why they don't join the army. They see others who went to study instead of joining the army, and their situation has improved. On the other hand, they see soldiers and officers who have been discharged, and what is waiting for them? Do they get appointed to government jobs? No. Why? Because their names are Jalal."

The sense of being ignored by the state deepens their tendency to isolation, he says. "I was in the 890 Paratroopers Brigade. I was injured in the Chinese farms and in Lebanon. I reached the rank of colonel in Border Patrol—so give me my rights. We only want what we deserve."

David Nafso, 23 years old, was discharged from the Israeli army a year and a half ago, and he has had difficulties finding a job since then. "I took part-time jobs, including gardening. I tried to get a job in several security companies, but I failed," he says. "Now they summon me for reserve duty to stand guard. I won't work as a reservist in this state. Am I suitable as a guard in the reserves but not as a civilian?" He says he only realized his true status in the state after he was subjected to a humiliating personal search in the airport, when he asked to travel to Europe after being discharged from the army. "They treated me as if I were a terrorist," he says (Ashkenazi, E. 2004, 'Some Circassians have had enough discrimination and returned to their homeland in the Caucasus', *Haaretz*, 8 February. Circassian World website [http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz\\_eng.html](http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz_eng.html) – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 5).

## **Education**

According to the Circassian World website, Circassians are usually fluent in Hebrew, Circassian, Arabic and English. Circassian is spoken in their own community. Children are educated at the village junior schools, and learn the Circassian language, and then continue their education at either Jewish or Arab schools:

Kfar-Kama the larger village has Jewish settlements as neighbours. Children graduate from village school and continue their education at Jewish schools.

They learn Hebrew, English and Circassian at school, National Circassian Alphabet of Caucasus is used in teaching Circassian. Reyhaniye is closer to Arab settlements as neighbours and children are able to go both Arab and Jewish schools...Circassians living in these two villages communicate in own Circassian language ('The Circassians in Israel' (undated), Circassian World website <http://www.circassianworld.com/Israel.html> – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 9; see also: Aisenberg, L. 2005, 'A quiet minority', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 June – Attachment 4).

A 2007 article reports recent government plans to inject more funds into the Arab, Druze, Bedouin and Circassian education systems ('Government adds \$63 million to budget for non-Jewish education' 2007, *Yedioth News*, 5 June <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3396419,00.html> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 13).

## **Security**

The war with Lebanon affected the communities in the North, with unfit public shelters and

hospitals, and lack of government commitment to rehabilitation. According to a March 2007 article, the situation is worse in non-Jewish communities:

As could be expected, the situation is the worst in Arab and Druze communities. Nazareth reported that it does not have even one public shelter in its territory. In villages that do have public shelters, most are located inside schools. The Alshajur council, which includes a number of villages that were hit hard by rocket barrages during the war, has no public shelters besides the ones at educational institutions (Mandel, R. 2007, 'Ynet inquiry: Public shelters in deplorable condition', *Yediot News*, 13 March <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3375705,00.html> – Accessed 17 August 2007 – Attachment 14; see also: Eichner, I. 2007, 'No money, no shelters', *Yediot News*, 22 June <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3416152,00.html> – Accessed 17 August 2007 – Attachment 15).

According to a 2006 article, the effects of the war on non-Jewish settlements was largely ignored. Unlike Jewish settlements, there were no warning sirens, nor adequate shelters:

Since the fighting broke out, the media has demonstrably ignored the bombs and missiles that have landed on Druze and Arab settlements, and the despair of those citizens has not been heard.

...As opposed to the Jewish sector, the Arab and Druze home front can't take refuge in bomb shelter or reinforced room, and they don't have the benefit of warning sirens.

The Home Front Command does not publish its announcements in Arabic, and the settlements themselves don't qualify for government aid for being in the "line of fire" (Oppenheimer, Y. 2006, 'No sirens in Arabic', *Yedioth News*, 20 June <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/1,7340,L-3278695,00.html> – Accessed 17 August 2007 – Attachment 16).

A 2006 article discusses minority groups and Israel's demographics, especially in the North:

Eival Gilady, chairman of the Western Galilee College, told participants at the Herzliya Conference on Monday that the Arab majority in the North is creating a dangerous continuity between Lebanon and the West Bank.

"The partition plan is happening before our eyes," the retired brigadier-general said during a session titled The Galilee – National Priority and Challenge. "The link between Lebanon and the West Bank is taking place. I don't think this is good for Arabs, for Jews or for the state."

...In a session on demography and Israel's borders, MK Ahmed Tibi said, "The way the state relates to Arabs as a demographic problem... deepens the alienation, the discrimination."

Tibi called for all of the Arab minority – Druze, Beduin, Circassian and otherwise – to be given the single status of a national minority, similar to the status of minorities in Canada.

"We want integration based on respect and equality – not separation, but recognition as a minority with rights," Tibi said. "We are citizens of Israel and we want to emphasize this, but we can't do it alone. It needs to be done by relations between the majority and the minority" (Halpern, O. 2006, 'Panel: Gap between Arabs and Jews must be closed', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 January – Attachment 10).

## **Military Service**

2007 journal article discusses various aspects of conscription in Israel, including the

importance of its function as a tool for nation building. According to this article, the practice of conscription:

[S]eeks to create a more unified and cohesive Jewish population by segregating it from non-Jews, with the exceptions of Druze, Bedouin and Circassian... **Even Druze, Bedouin and Circassian are treated like “second class soldiers” and are posted in low security and interest environments**... The IDF was created, among other reasons, as a bonding instrument of the Jewish population, and as such Arabs are excluded for two reasons: firstly, they are not Jewish, and secondly, the IDF prepared its defence largely against Arab countries – a loyalty dilemma for Arabs living in Israel [researcher emphasis added] (Mirsaeedi, S. 2007, ‘Nationalism, Loyalty and the Exit Strategy in Israel and Iran: Compulsory Military Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, *Policy Challenges*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, April, p. 28 [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202\\_Final.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202_Final.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 2).

A 2006 journal article discusses the changes in the social composition of the military between the outbreak of the Lebanon War in 1982, and the more recent Al-Aqsa Intifada beginning in 2000. The article notes that there has been an increasing lack of motivation to sacrifice via military service amongst the middle class of Israeli society, which has led to the state increasingly drawing on peripheral groups that were “more willing to sacrifice themselves for a lower price”. Amongst others, these peripheral groups include more recent Jewish immigrants, mainly from Russia and Ethiopia, and non-Jewish minority groups. The author notes that there are no official statistics regarding the ethnic composition of the IDF, but also notes that the percentage of casualties from peripheral social groups increased from 55% of casualties in 1982 to 75% of casualties in 2000. The article also includes the percentage of casualties from each social group in proportion to the population. Circassians (who only represent 0.04% of the population) are included in the group consisting of “Druze, Bedouin, etc.”. According to the figures given in the article, this group’s casualties (in proportion to the population) increased by 1300% between the two wars (Levy, Y. 2006, ‘The War of the Peripheries: A Social Mapping of IDF Casualties in the Al-Aqsa Intifada’, *Social Identities*, Vol. 12, Issue 3, May, pp. 311-320 – Attachment 17).

An article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* also notes that conscripted non-Jewish youth suffer the same discrimination as Arabs in Israel:

Since the state of Israel was founded, young Arabs have been suspected of disloyalty and excluded from compulsory military service. Arabs have refused to fight their own kind on the other side of the border. Conscripted non-Jewish youth, Druze or Circassian, Bedouins or Christian Arabs, suffer the same discriminations as Arabs.

...There are many other controversial topics apart from national service, starting with the national identity of Arab citizens. The state requires unswerving loyalty to Israel, which is defined as a “Jewish state”, “state of the Jews”, “Jewish and Zionist state” or, according to the Basic Law, a “Jewish and democratic state”. None of these terms takes into account the existence of a large Arab community representing nearly 20% of the population, which is reduced to the status of a “non-Jewish minority”. Arab citizens of Israel and their representatives demand that Israel become the “state of all its citizens” or “of all its nations”, but the government categorically refuses such definitions. The argument it uses, that the situation in Arab countries is identical, is strange, since it compares a state that calls itself democratic (Israel) with authoritarian (Arab) states (Algazy, J. 2005, ‘Israel’s Palestinian citizens’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October – Attachment 3).

The above-mentioned 2004 *Haaretz* article discusses problems faced by Circassians who have returned from military service (Ashkenazi, E. 2004, 'Some Circassians have had enough discrimination and returned to their homeland in the Caucasus', *Haaretz*, 8 February. Circassian World website [http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz\\_eng.html](http://www.circassianworld.com/Haaretz_eng.html) – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 5).

### **Refusal to serve**

A 2003 journal article in *Central Asian Survey* discusses the growth of Islamic revivalism among Israeli Circassians. The article notes a growing frustration “towards the state of Israel because of perceived discrimination”, as well as “the sense of frustration amongst many youths regarding the community’s relations with the state”. Islamic ideology has also influenced attitudes towards conscription:

Additionally, the Islamist activists’ ideology had a certain amount of influence on the issue of military service. Although only a handful of people have actually pleaded devotion to Islam in order to avoid army service,...this is a new development in a community that has always emphasized its relationship with the state and the importance of compulsory military service.

... this ideology, together with the other areas of influence...led to the practical consequence of a considerable number of youths (some of whom were already soldiers in the I.D.F.) noting related ideological factors (such as pan-Islamic arguments) in order to explain the lack of motivation during their compulsory service, and there were even a few cases of desertion and attempts to avoid military service altogether (Bram, C. 2003, 'Muslim revivalism and the emergence of civic society. A case study of an Israeli-Circassian community', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, March, pp. 12-13

[http://www.circassianworld.com/CCAS\\_ChenBRAM.pdf](http://www.circassianworld.com/CCAS_ChenBRAM.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 6).

A 2007 report on the Radio Adiga website describes the protests of Circassian youths in Kfar Kama against recent recruitment orders:

When the prescribed day arrived about 15 folks stood at the recruiting centre and declared their unwilling to join the army and that it is forbidden by religion. In a short time for them arrived second letter aimed at those who did not stand at the first time, in which by little square there emphasized warning: “For that you didn’t stand at the first “Stand Decree” you should stand now according to this decree, if not we will have to compel against you with legal measures according to security service law, including issuing commandment of detention by Israeli Police.”

Resident of Kfar Kama village Circassian Muslim Lousten Achmoz sent to the Ministry of Defense the following letter:

“Firstly I will bring to your attention that according to Islam serving in IDF is forbidden.

I see severe collision between obligatory recruitment of Circassians and law of religion freedom. For some time I study this issue and I contact with human rights associations in case that representative demand is required.

I understand that this issue has been raised up in the presence of Kfar Kama council but any solution was not found. I see it right thing to write you this letter and I hope to receive your reply.

Today there is about 20 youth who are nominated to be sent to jail because their unwillingness to be recruited for one simple reason, it is forbidden by religion. The Ministry

of Defense had asked before to define who is “religious” among the Circassians, so as long as the person bear witness that he is Muslim it means that he is religious (belongs to the acknowledged religion in the country) therefore there is no place for questions in this matter.

There were inspections of who pray at mosque and who is not, so if Muslim choose not to pray at the mosque or to violate such virtue or other it is indeed was according to a choice, but obligatory recruitment imposes on that Circassian to violate the Islam religion.

I ask you to consider release of Circassians from obligatory recruitment” (‘We Don’t Want to Join Army’ 2007, Radio Adiga website, 11 April <http://www.radioadiga.com/ClosedIndex/artikkk.php?ind=2467> – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 18).

Similarly, a growing number of Druze youth are rejecting compulsory military service and reaffirming their Arab identity. As a larger population, there is more information regarding Druze “refuseniks”; however, a number of sources note that the situation of Druze conscientious objectors does not receive much attention from media or the peace movement. A 2003 paper by Andreas Speck for War Resisters International also notes that “it has been reported in the past that Druze objectors are apt to receive exceptionally severe sentences for draft evasion and desertion (Speck, Andreas 2003, ‘Conscientious objection to military service in Israel: an unrecognised human right’, War Resisters’ International website, 3 February <http://wri-irg.org/pdf/co-isr-03.pdf> – Accessed 24 January 2006 – Attachment 19; see also: ‘More Druze refuseniks despite Israeli threats’ 2007, International Middle East Media Center website, 6 July <http://www.imemc.org/article/49363> – Accessed 7 August 2007 – Attachment 20; ‘Arab Druze artist imprisoned for refusing army service’ 2006, *Weekly Review of Human Rights Violations of the Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel*, No. 271, April 21-28 <http://arabhra.org/publications/wrap/2006/wrap271.doc> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 21).

Other articles of interest include:

- A 2003 article in the War Resisters International newsletter, reporting on the situation of Druze conscientious objectors (Speck, A. 2003, ‘Druze Conscientious Objectors: Discrimination, silence, and ignorance’, *The Broken Rifle*, No. 58, May <http://www.wri-irg.org/pdf/br58may15.pdf> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 22);
- An August 2006 article reporting on the refusal of soldiers in the Galilee division of the reserve company to continue to serve as reserve soldiers (‘Infantry petition: We won’t do reserve duty anymore’ 2006, *Yedioth News*, 22 August <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3294171,00.html> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 23).

## **2. Please provide any information on whether there is any form of conscientious objection or alternative military service for Circassians in Israel.**

According to the available information, grounds for conscientious objection are especially limited for conscripted minorities in Israel. The information also indicates that there is currently no form of alternative military service available, either for Circassians or any other conscripts. A 2007 journal article states that the “underlying intention to utilize conscription

as a tool for nation building permitted only very few exemptions in Israel.” However, a growing number of Circassian youth are objecting to serving in the military on the grounds of their Muslim religion. Similarly, a growing number of Druze youth are objecting to serving in the military against other Arabs. As noted above, military service is considered an important factor in the tiny Circassian community’s relationship with the state of Israel. It should also be noted that the Circassian (and Druze) authorities appear to make a point of distancing themselves from calls to change the system of compulsory military service for these communities (for information on conscientious objection, see: Speck, A. 2003, ‘Druze Conscientious Objectors: Discrimination, silence, and ignorance’, *The Broken Rifle*, No. 58, May <http://www.wri-irg.org/pdf/br58may15.pdf> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 22; for information on military conscription, see: Mirsaedi, S. 2007, ‘Nationalism, Loyalty and the Exit Strategy in Israel and Iran: Compulsory Military Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, *Policy Challenges*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, April [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202\\_Final.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202_Final.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 2; for information on growing Muslim revivalism, see: Bram, C. 2003, ‘Muslim revivalism and the emergence of civic society. A case study of an Israeli-Circassian community’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, March, pp. 12-13 [http://www.circassianworld.com/CCAS\\_ChenBRAM.pdf](http://www.circassianworld.com/CCAS_ChenBRAM.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 6; for information on comments by Circassian authorities on compulsory military service, see: Ettinger, Y. 2004, ‘Israeli Arab leaders call for refusal to serve in IDF’, *Haaretz*, 19 December <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=516345&contrassID=1&subContrassID=5&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y> – Accessed 1 August 2007 – Attachment 24).

A recent research response provides information on the military service system in Israel and any provisions made for pacifists (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response ISR31732*, 26 June – Attachment 25).

A June 2007 response to information request by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada provides information on the military service law and conscientious objectors (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *ISR102548.E – Israel: Whether there has been an amendment to the military service law; if yes, whether the law is more open/flexible with respect to conscientious objectors; what the law states with respect to conscientious objectors*, 7 June – Attachment 26).

The most recent US Department of State report on human rights practices in Israel notes that Druze and Circassian males “were subject to the military draft, and the overwhelming majority accepted service willingly” (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – Israel & The Occupied Territories*, March, Section 5 – Attachment 1).

The above mentioned February 2003 paper by Andreas Speck notes that:

According to IDF officials a conscientious objector is referred to the Conscience Committee if he states to an IDF official that he cannot perform military service on grounds of conscientious objection. However, in many cases men who express their conscientious objection are not transferred to the Conscience Committee; this is especially the case with Druze conscientious objectors” (Speck, Andreas 2003, ‘Conscientious objection to military service in Israel: an unrecognised human right’, War Resisters’ International website, 3 February <http://wri-irg.org/pdf/co-isr-03.pdf> – Accessed 24 January 2006 – Attachment 19).

An Amnesty International report, published in 1999, contains details of a Circassian man whose attempts to be exempt from military service in the IDF on the grounds of conscientious objection were repeatedly refused. The man spent time in prison on two occasions and was required to continue his military service upon his release. The report also states:

Since compulsory military service was imposed on Druze men in 1956, many Druze have refused to perform regular military service or reserve duty. According to the Committee for the Druze Initiative, a Druze association which campaigns against Druze conscription, since 1956 about 5,000 Druze have been imprisoned for refusing to serve in the IDF. The committee does not have statistics on how many of those imprisoned declared to the IDF that they were conscientious objectors. The majority of Druze objectors have justified their refusal to perform military service to the IDF on the basis of economic and social circumstances or poor physical or mental health. There is reportedly a great deal of fear within the Druze community of actively stating conscientious objection as the reason for refusing to serve as many Druze perceive that a conscientious objector may face problems in securing employment. However, a small number of Druze have declared to the IDF that their refusal to serve is for reasons of conscience. Most Druze conscientious objectors base their objection on their refusal to bear arms against other Arabs. Some have also cited pacifist beliefs (Amnesty International 1999, *Israel: The Price of Principles – Imprisonment of Conscientious Objectors*, September, MDE 15/49/99, p. 14 – Attachment 27).

A 2004 article reports comments by the chairman of the Druze and Circassian authorities that “service in the Israel Defense Forces has almost a complete consensus”:

In wake of the killing of five Israel Defense Forces soldiers from the Bedouin reconnaissance battalion last Sunday, the Israeli Arab political leadership published a manifesto Saturday calling on all Arab youths, including Druze and Bedouins, to refuse to serve in the IDF.

In the statement, issued by the Israeli Arab Monitoring Committee, no reason was given for the “total refusal to take part in either compulsory or voluntary service in the Israeli army.”

Members of the committee explained that they felt they must once again voice this position, though it is not new, in light of the fact that the service of Israeli Arabs is on the public agenda after the five soldiers were killed when a booby-trapped tunnel blew up under an army outpost near Rafah, in the Gaza Strip.

... The chairman of the Druze and Circassian authorities, Malec Bader, said in response to the manifesto that “service in the Israel Defense Forces has almost a complete consensus, and so we are not part of such calls (against service in the IDF)” (Ettinger, Y. 2004, ‘Israeli Arab leaders call for refusal to serve in IDF’, *Haaretz*, 19 December <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=516345&contrassID=1&subContrassID=5&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y> – Accessed 1 August 2007 – Attachment 24).

### **3. Please provide any information on how refusal to undertake military service is perceived in Israel.**

The available information suggests that there has been a recent focus on refusal to undertake military service in Israel, largely as a result of a number of IDF soldiers refusing to take part in operations against Jewish settlers during the withdrawal of Gaza and the West Bank. According to a number of sources, set out below, the response to this has been a crackdown on the level of refusal and draft-dodging.

A 2007 journal article discusses loyalty and nationalism in relation to compulsory military service in Israel. The article notes that military service is considered the “most significant of all national obligations”:

Israel’s demography and geo-political position has formed the basis of its national security strategy. In 1948, at the creation of the Israeli state, 600,000 to 650,000 Jews lived in Israel whilst being surrounded by many millions of Arabs and Persians (Rodman 2003, p.112). Its controversial position in the Middle East and its struggle for territorial integrity with very few (if any) allies in the region has forced Israel to establish a self-sustaining and powerful defence force (Van Creveld 2002, p.103). Commonly referred to as the “nation in arms” that was “born in war” and “always faces a direct military threat” this country’s army has become involved in all facets of Israeli life, far beyond the traditional military role (Ben Meir 1999, p. 37). The military has become an integral aspect of social norms and traditions, apart from being a responsibility. Thus inevitably military service is considered the “most significant of all national obligations” (Mirsaeedi, S. 2007, ‘Nationalism, Loyalty and the Exit Strategy in Israel and Iran: Compulsory Military Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, *Policy Challenges*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, April, p. 26

[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202\\_Final.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MPA/PDFs/Policy%20Challenge%20Volume%201%20Issue%202_Final.pdf) – Accessed 6 August 2007 – Attachment 2).

### **Draft dodging**

The following recent media articles detail the recent crackdown on draft-dodging and refusal to serve:

‘Dismantle the refusal front’ 2007, *Haaretz*, 8 August:

This is the big test for Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi. Over the last few days, Barak and Ashkenazi repeatedly condemned evasion of duty, but refusal is no less dangerous. Political refusal – and cloaking it in religious terms does not disguise its political nature – is a malignant growth in the IDF’s body. Military authorities must fight it without compromise. Refusal from the right is no more acceptable or worthy of understanding than refusal from the left. If there is the chance of a political compromise that will lead to peace with the Palestinians, it entails the evacuation of settlements. An army that conveys weakness toward those who refuse its orders will not be able to be a reliable and skilled tool of those who dispatch it.

The refuseniks’ organization is a declaration of revolt, and must be dealt with to the full extent of the law (‘Dismantle the refusal front’ 2007, *Haaretz*, 8 August

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/890548.html> – Accessed 8 August 2007 – Attachment 28).

‘Barak: Refusal has no place in IDF, only commanders give orders’, *Haaretz*, 7 August:

Defense Minister Ehud Barak spoke out for the first time Tuesday regarding the refusal of a dozen Israel Defense Forces soldiers to participate in the evacuation of settlers in Hebron, saying “refusal...no matter what side it comes from...has no place in our army.”

...The defense minister said the army is taking steps to reduce the level of refusal and draft-dodging (Shragai, N. 2007, ‘Barak: Refusal has no place in IDF, only commanders give orders’, *Haaretz*, 7 August <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/890563.html> – Accessed 8 August 2007 – Attachment 29).

‘Israel army ousts Hebron settlers’ 2007, *BBC News*, 7 August:

Israeli forces have forcibly removed dozens of Jewish settlers from two houses in the West Bank town of Hebron.

...The Israeli army jailed 12 soldiers on Monday for up to four weeks for refusing to take part in the operation ('Israel army ousts Hebron settlers' 2007, *BBC News*, 7 August [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6934445.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6934445.stm) – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 30).

'IDF defector jailed' 2007, *Yedioth News*, 6 August:

A military court in Jaffa has sentenced a young man to six months in prison for his failure to enlist to the IDF. The man was caught two weeks ago after having dodged the mandatory draft for six years.

... A prosecution representative said that S deserved a punishment that would deter others from making the same choice when it came time to enlist.

... Judge Levi harshly criticized the defendant's behavior in particular and the draft-dodging phenomenon in general ('IDF defector jailed' 2007, *Yedioth News*, 6 August <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3434101,00.html> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 31).

'IDF chief: Draft dodgers have no shame' 2007, *Yedioth News*, 31 July:

Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi says phenomenon of evading army service is eroding Israeli society and military, and must be eradicated ('IDF chief: Draft dodgers have no shame' 2007, *Yedioth News*, 31 July <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3432247,00.html> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 32).

'IDF soldiers Israel's true heroes, Barak says', *Yedioth News*, 30 July:

"We must return to the days in which evading the IDF draft was akin to wearing a Mark of Cain on your forehead," Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Monday amid recent reports of a rise in the phenomenon (Kapshuk, Y. 2007, 'IDF soldiers Israel's true heroes, Barak says', *Yedioth News*, 30 July <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3431726,00.html> – Accessed 20 August 2007 – Attachment 33).

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Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

#### **United Nations (UN)**

UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.ch/>

#### **Non-Government Organisations**

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

Internal Displacement Centre <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

## International News & Politics

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

Haaretz <http://www.haaretz.com/>

## Topic Specific Links

War Resisters' International [www.wri-irg.org](http://www.wri-irg.org)

Refuser Solidarity Network [www.refusersolidarity.net](http://www.refusersolidarity.net)

European Centre for Minority Issues <http://www.ecmi.de/>

Jewish Virtual Library <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>

Arab Association for Human Rights <http://arabhra.org/>

Circassian World <http://www.circassianworld.com/>

## Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:		
Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIAC	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Research & Information Services database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
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