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Syria: requirements and procedures to obtain, renew, and replace passports and national identity cards; information and details contained in each document, including physical characteristics (2013-July 2015)

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1. Procedures to Obtain, Renew, and Replace a Passport

1.1 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Syria

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official at the Honorary Consulate General of Syria in Montreal indicated that, in regards to applications made in Syria, applicants must personally submit their passport application in their city of residence (Syria 4 Aug. 2015). The same source noted that if an individual is not able to apply in person, their father, mother, sibling or power of attorney may do so on their behalf (ibid.). Sources indicate that the cost of a passport is US\$400 (ibid.; Arutz Sheva 17 June 2015; SANA 21 Apr. 2015) and the cost for passport renewals is US\$200 (ibid.; Arutz Sheva 17 June 2015).

The US Department of State's Country Reciprocity Schedule for Syria states that the "Department of Immigration and Passport" within the Ministry of Interior is responsible for issuing passports (US n.d.).

The Economist reports that passports for men who have not completed compulsory military service are valid for two years and can only be renewed in person, in Syria or by applying "at one of the semi-functional embassies abroad" (23 Oct. 2014). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.2 Passport Renewals Abroad

According to the website of the Honorary Consulate General of Syria in Montreal, Syrian nationals living in Canada and the US who want to renew their passports must submit their application to the consulate in Montreal within a maximum of three months prior to the expiry date indicated on their passports (Syria n.d.). Minors or those who do not have the legal capacity to file for a renewal are required to give written approval by their legal guardians (ibid.). The instructions indicate that applicants must include their current passport, a document proving their residency in Canada or the US, a copy of an identity card or "Registration Extract" providing their date of birth as well as their "number and place of civil registration" (ibid.). In addition, applicants must include four photographs and a cash payment of US\$200 (ibid.). A copy of the instructions and application forms for renewing a passport has been attached to this Response (Attachment 1).

Sources report that in April 2015, Syrian authorities issued a decision allowing citizens who fled the war to obtain passports without an "intelligence review" (Al Jazeera 27 Apr. 2015; ARA News 28 Apr. 2015; AFP 27 Apr. 2015). Two sources indicate that according to Al-Watan Arabic language daily newspaper (W3newspapers n.d.), as of April 2015, embassies are now able to issue or renew passports to citizens who have fled the war, without having to "go through the department of emigration and passports in Damascus" (ibid.; ARA News 28 Apr. 2015). The same sources also stated that "[p]assports will also be issued to Syrians even if they left in an illegal manner or they hold non-official passports or travel documents" (ibid.; AFP 27 Apr. 2015).

Al Jazeera cites a journalist for ARA news, a "Syrian independent press agency" (ARA News n.d.), as stating that refugees applying for new passports at the Syrian consulate in Beirut were asked to present "identification, a Lebanese entrance card and, for men, a military status card -even if it indicated they had not served in the army" (Al Jazeera 27 Apr. 2015). The same journalist was cited by Al Jazeera as stating that for passport renewals at the consulate in Beirut Syrians were "simply" required to present their passports and they were granted an extension "within a few hours" (ibid.).

The National, "Abu Dhabi Media's first English-language publication" (The National n.d.), reports that in January 2015 the Syrian embassy in Doha, Qatar, which is "run by the Syrian National Coalition [SNC], which is opposed to the regime of President Bashar Al Assad," announced that it would issue passport extensions of two to four years to Syrian expatriates, and that this "scheme" would then be extended to "expatriates in other countries" (The National 22 Mar. 2015). The same source notes that the embassy has since reversed its decision, leaving expatriates "in limbo" (ibid.). Corroborating and further information on processing times in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Turkey or the United Arab Emirates could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.3 Challenges to Obtaining, Renewing or Replacing a Passport

The US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 indicates that Syrian citizens have the right to travel, however, citizens were denied passports and other important documents by the government based on their "political views, association with opposition groups, or ties to geographic areas where the opposition dominated" (US 25 June 2015, 38). The Christian Science Monitor cites a member of the SNC as stating that "[t]he regime has deprived anyone from the opposition of their civic right to get a national ID or other legal

documents" (The Christian Science Monitor 15 Mar. 2015). Sources further report that Syrian authorities have denied documentation to individuals "wanted by the regime" and that the Islamic State (IS) [1] has been destroying passports and other legal documents in Syria (The Economist 23 Oct. 2014; US 25 June 2015, 38).

The Christian Science Monitor indicates that children who are born in opposition-held areas face the most difficulties in accessing nationality in the future (The Christian Science Monitor 15 Mar. 2015). The same source further indicates that approximately 900 children are born each month in IS-controlled areas of Deir Ezzor [city in Syria] and none "have access to documentation that would be recognized by Syrian or other authorities" (ibid.).

According to a 2013 article by the Los Angeles Times, although the Syrian government agreed in 2013 to renew the passports of "millions of Syrians living abroad," Syrian expatriates said that embassies and consulates have "refused to renew their passports, insisting that holders of expired documents return to Syria to sort out their paperwork" (27 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information about challenges for Syrians abroad to renew passports in 2014 and 2015 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Physical Characteristics and Security Features of the Passport

The consulate official indicated that the Syrian passport includes the passport holder's name, date of birth, expiry date and photograph; and no specific security features (4 Aug. 2015).

The website of the Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online (PRADO), a website hosted by the Council of the European Union (EU) that provides information on the appearance, validity and features of authentic identity and travel documents in a given country (EU n.d.a), indicates that Syrian passports are in the form of a single booklet, made of blue plastic, with a cover embossing which is hot foil stamped (PRADO n.d.b.). Passports vary between 34 and 48 pages and are approximately 88mm wide and 125mm in height (ibid.). According to PRADO, Syrian passports are valid for a maximum of six years and security features include a watermark and UV feature (ibid.). Further information on the physical characteristics of Syrian passports and samples have been attached to this Response (Attachment 2).

3. National Identity Cards

3.1 Syrian National Identity Cards

Information on Syrian national identity cards was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The consulate official indicated that the consulate does not accept applications to obtain National ID Cards (Syria 4 Aug. 2015). The US Country Reciprocity Schedule for Syria states that ID cards are available to individuals "after the age of 14" and they are free of charge (US n.d.). The same source notes that national ID cards must be obtained in person by the Civil Registrar within the Civil Affairs Department of the Ministry of the Interior (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In December 2014, while responding to questions posed by Assembly members, Syria's Interior Minister indicated that a new system for issuing ID cards was being developed and that the "delays in issuing IDs in Aleppo [are] due to the increased number of requests for replacing damaged or lost IDs, long power outage times, and the difficulty of procuring materials for

making IDs (SANA 23 Dec. 2014). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 ISIL-Issued ID Cards

Agence France-Presse reports that according to "a monitor and activists," ISIS has been issuing ID cards and administrative documents to males only in Raqqa province (AFP 17 Apr. 2015). The same source notes that according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British based organization, ISIS has been issuing photo ID cards to boys over the age of 13 who do not have any proof of identity (ibid.). The ID "carries the photo of the holder, his name, date and place of birth and his parent's names, and is marked 'Wilayat (district of) Raqa'" (ibid.). The same source cites activist Mohamed Saleh as saying that "ISIS is requesting 'that people who do not have identity papers register at the civil registry in the city as a first step towards getting an identity card'" and that fighters were already receiving new cards (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State (IS), or Daesh in Arabic (US n.d., 1). The UN notes that ISIL controls large "swathes of territory in the governates of Aleppo, Ar-Raqqah, Idlib, Al Hassakah and Dayr Az Zawr" (16 June 2015).

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Attachments

1. Syria. Honorary Consulate General of Syria in Montreal. "Passport Renewal Information and Application." [Accessed 5 August 2015]

2. European Union (EU). Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online (PRADO). N.d. "Document: SYR-AO-01003." [Accessed 27 July 2015]

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