

Topic: **Religion - Muslims**

Updated: **June 2014**

- By the end of 2011, the Muslim community numbered 1,354,000, constituting 84% of the total Arab and Druze population in Israel and 17% of the total population in Israel.²
- 37% of Muslims in Israel reside in the Northern district of the country; 22% in the Jerusalem district; 14% in the Haifa district, 15% in the Southern district, 11% in the Central district; and 1% in the Tel Aviv district.³
- The “Triangle” region, which is part of the central district, is exclusively Muslim.⁴ Arab inhabitants are exclusively Muslim in the Negev, which is part of the Southern district (Also see Fact Sheet on Geographical Distribution and Type of Settlement). The Arab population in this region consists mostly of Negev Bedouin.
- According to the most recent figures released by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the overall fertility rate of the Muslims in Israel decreased from about 4.7 in 1990 to 3.5 in 2011.⁵ However, in 2011, this rate was still considerably higher than that of other religious sects in Israel: Druze – 2.33, Christian Arabs – 2.1, and Jews and others – 2.98.
- In 2011, about 38%, or 519,000, of the entire Muslim population was under 14, and nearly half of the population (48.6%) was 19 and under.⁶
- In 2011, approximately one fifth of the Muslims in Israel resided in Jerusalem (296,905 inhabitants, 30% of the city’s population). Other large Muslim population centers included: Rahat, with 55,000 inhabitants (99.8% of which are Muslim), Nazareth, with a Muslim population of 51,000, and Umm al-Fahm, located at the northern part of the “Triangle” region, with

¹ Compiled by Prof. Elie Rekhess, Associate Director, Crown Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, Northwestern University

² CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, tables 2.1, 2.4.

³ Nurit Yaffe (editor), *The Arab Population in Israel 2008*, Statisti-lite no. 102 (CBS, March 2010), p. 8, available at: http://www.cbs.gov.il/www/statistical/arab_pop08e.pdf.

CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, tables 2.1, 2.4

⁴ Hillel Frisch, *Israel’s Security and Its Arab Citizens*, pp. 72; CBS, *The Moslem Population in Israel* (Press release, November 26, 2009) [Hebrew].

⁵ CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, tables 3.13, available at:

http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton.html?num_tab=st03_13&CYear=2012.

⁶ CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, tables 2.10, available at: http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton63/st02_10x.pdf.

48,300 residents.⁷

- The vast majority of Muslims in Israel are Sunni.
- The 1948 Arab-Israeli War created a structural vacuum in the life of the Israeli Muslim community. Organized Islam virtually disappeared. Almost every member of the Muslim religious establishment of Mandatory Palestine fled. The Muslims in the newly established State of Israel were left without religious court judges, prayer leaders, and other functionaries necessary to sustain the religious life of the community.
- After 1948, Israel was faced with the challenge of reestablishing the Muslim religious apparatus. As a first step, the authorities assumed control of the administration of the *Waqf* (religious endowment).
- The Sharia Court system was gradually reconstructed, but it took years to restore the situation to normal, mainly because there were few people qualified to assume religious appointments. By necessity, under-qualified men were occasionally hired. In 1953, the Knesset passed the Sharia Courts Law in order to retroactively ratify the term of Qadis (religious court judges) who had been appointed prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.
- In May 1961, the Knesset ratified the *Qadis Law*.⁸ The Law stipulated that the Qadis be selected by a committee with a Muslim majority, appointed by the President of the State of Israel, and dispense justice in accordance with Israeli laws.
- In 2011, eight religious Sharia Courts operated in Israel: in Akko (Qadi Ziyad Lahwani), Nazareth (Qadi Muhammad Abu Ubaid), Haifa (Qadi Adnan Adawi), Jaffa (Qadi Muhammad Rashid Zibda), Tayibe (Qadi Hamza Hamza), Be'er Sheva (Qadi Dhawkan al-Atawna), Jerusalem (Hashim Su'ad), and Baqa al-Gharbiyye (Qadi Muhammad Abu Ubaid).
- Jerusalem is also the site of the Supreme Sharia Court of Appeal, headed by Qadi Ahmad al-Natur.
- The Sharia Courts were granted exclusive jurisdiction in matters of personal status with a few caveats imposed by the Knesset: prohibiting the marriage of girls under 17, outlawing polygamy and forbidding men to divorce a woman against her will.
- In 2008, prayer rooms for Muslim patients and visitors were opened in two central Israeli hospitals: Tel Hashomer Hospital in the Tel Aviv area, and Rambam Hospital in Haifa, in which 20 percent of the physicians are Arab. Two more Muslim prayer rooms are planned to be opened in the Ha'emek Hospital in Afula and in the Soroka Hospital in Be'er Sheva (which will serve the Bedouin community in the Negev).
- In March 2009, the Government of the State of Israel announced that two million NIS will be allocated in the State's budget for the restoration of mosques and Islamic holy sites, such as cemeteries, in ruined Arab villages in Israel. The budget will be administered by the Israel Land

⁷ CBS, *The Muslim Population in Israel-- Data on the Occasion of Eid al-Adha, 2012* [Hebrew].

⁸ For the full text of the *Qadis Law (1961)*, See: http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/eng/law/kns4_qadis_eng.pdf.

⁹ "Israel", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 2007.

¹⁰ *Ha'ir, Ratsui Ve-Matsui*, February 8, 2008.

Makor Rishon, October 31, 2008.

Sinara, February 8, 2008.

Administration (ILA).¹¹

- In 2010, Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem became a flashpoint between the Israeli government and many Muslim citizens (including Sheikh Raed Salah of the Islamic Movement), who opposed the plans to build a Museum of Tolerance over Muslim grave sites. Plans to build over the cemetery were ultimately overthrown by Supreme Court Justice Dorit Beinisch.¹²
- Also, see the Fact Sheet on the Islamic Movement in Israel.

¹¹ *Index Ha'emek Ve-hagalil*, March 20, 2009.

¹² Noam Dvir, "Grave concerns," *Ha'aretz*, October 25, 2011. See: <http://www.haaretz.com/culture/arts-leisure/grave-concerns-1.391852>.