

## Israel: Basic Facts

### The Land

Israel's area, including the areas under Palestinian self-government, is 10,840 square miles, about one fifth the size of the state of Missouri. The country is 290 miles in length (a six hour drive by car) and about 85 miles across at its widest point.



Missouri – Israel Size Comparison

**General Population** 7.7 million (according to 2010 statistics\*)  
Jewish population: 5.66 million (75.4% of the population)  
Arab population: 1.52 million (20.4% of the population)  
84% Moslem  
8% Christian  
8% Druze  
Other populations: 319,000 (4.2% of the population)

### Democracy in Israel

Since Israel's establishment in 1948 the country was and still remains the only democracy in the Middle East. Like every U.S. citizen, Israel's citizens enjoy the right to vote, freedom of press, religious freedom, emancipation and equal access to education, employment and health care. There is a constitution, a judicial system and an elected parliament that ensures the rights of the men and women, Jews, Arabs and Christians.

#### The Knesset

- The Knesset is the unicameral (single chamber) parliament of Israel. The 18<sup>th</sup> Knesset has 120 members. Fifteen of those members represent minority groups:
  - Arabs – 11
  - Druze – 4
- There are 3 Arab political parties represented in the 18<sup>th</sup> Knesset.
- There are 24 women members of the 18<sup>th</sup> Knesset, including one Arab-Israeli member.

#### The Judiciary

The judicial system in Israel is divided into two main types: the general law courts which are known as civil or regular courts, and tribunals and other authorities with judicial powers. The

## JCRC Issue Summary

Israeli Supreme Court takes an activist role in striking the appropriate balance between security and liberty. The Supreme Court consists of 12 justices and as of September, 2006 is headed by Israel's first woman president, Dorit Beinisch. Presently there are 6 men (one of whom is Israel's first Israeli-Arab justice) and 6 women.

### **Women in Israel**

- At the end of 2009, there were in Israel 3,816,900 women (50.5%)
- In 2010 55% of people studying for BA degree were women.
- In 2011, Women comprise 51% of all judges and 44% of all active lawyers.
- The life expectancy for women in Israel is 82 years compared to 80.4 years for women in the United States

### **Religious Freedom**

- While Israel is a Jewish state, it is largely secular and protects freedom of religion to Muslims, Christians and other religious groups.
- Each religious community is free by law to administer its internal affairs. Each has its own religious council and courts, recognized by law and with jurisdiction over all religious affairs and matters of personal status.
- The Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for supporting the religious needs of all communities in Israel, including the Muslim, Druze, Christian and Jewish communities.

### **Israel Defense Forces (IDF)**

- Since Israel's establishment Arab citizens have been exempted from IDF out of consideration for their family, religious and cultural affiliation with the Arab world as well as concern over possible dual loyalties.
- Since 1957, at the request of their community leaders IDF service has been mandatory for Druze and Circassian men, while the number of Bedouin joining the career army increases steadily.

### **Israel's Economy**

- Israel's leading exports are in the area of high technology, cut diamonds and agricultural products (fruits and vegetables). Despite limited natural resources, Israel has intensively developed its agricultural and industrial sectors over the past 20 years and is self-sufficient in most agricultural products.
- The combination of Israel's small land size, a small domestic market, and Israel's immense investment in research and development has fueled Israel's hi-tech growth. Israel is considered the "Second Silicon Valley" with development centers for companies such as Microsoft, Intel, Cisco and Google located in Israel. Technology for cell phones, voice mail, the Pentium MMX Chip and AOL Instant Messenger were all developed in Israel. In May, 2010 Israel became a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

\* From Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics



Guided by Jewish values, the JCRC informs, collaborates, advocates and takes action on issues in the public arena that are of central concern to the Jewish community.

#12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146-5776 E-mail [jrcrstl@jrcrstl.org](mailto:jrcrstl@jrcrstl.org) 314-442-3871 [www.jrcrstl.org](http://www.jrcrstl.org)

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