

## Nearly 1,300 stateless residents to get UAE citizenship

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Agence France-Presse - 28 December, 2006

Nearly 1,300 stateless residents of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are in the process of being granted citizenship, an interior ministry official has said.

The Supreme Federal Council, comprising the rulers of the UAE's seven emirates, "has given the green light for procedures to naturalize" a first short list of 1,294 people, said General Abdul Aziz al-Sharifi, who heads a commission charged with handling the issue of stateless residents.

The commission is "studying all the files of stateless people" in order to resolve the matter permanently, Sharifi, who is chief of preventive security at the interior ministry, said in a statement received by AFP Wednesday.

Interior Minister Sheikh Saif bin Zayed al-Nahayan said in October that the oil-rich Gulf monarchy plans to naturalize an unspecified number of eligible stateless people who lived in the country prior to the proclamation of the UAE federation on December 2, 1971.

He did not give figures, but an interior ministry source told AFP there are around 10,000 stateless people in the UAE. They are mainly of Iranian or Asian origin, or from Zanzibar, a Tanzanian archipelago which has a history of trade relations with the Gulf.

To be eligible for naturalization, a person must have lived permanently in the UAE prior to the creation of the federation, possess no documents proving former nationality and have no criminal record, Sharifi said in October.

"Those who do not fulfill these conditions will not be treated as stateless people and the interior ministry will treat them as illegal residents," he said.

Citizenship for stateless people, known as "bidoon" or "without" in Arabic, is an issue in several oil-rich Gulf monarchies where many of them have settled since the 1960s.

According to official statistics, the UAE has a population of 4.1 million, of whom just 21.9 percent are natives.