

Ambassador H.E. Mr Ali Hafrad
Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Sigurd Syrs gate 2
0273 Oslo

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the current state of Christians and their places of worship in Algeria. On 20 January 2020, 42-year-old Hamid Soudad, a Christian from the Oran province, was arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment for blasphemy, charged for insulting the Prophet of Islam, on the basis of a caricature he shared on social media. Moreover, there are at least two other instances of Christians sentenced to prison, accused for blasphemy.

I also wish to draw your attention to the closing of churches in Algeria, which has been a concern since January 2018. At that point, 13 churches were being forced to close, and since then, 7 more churches have been ordered to do the same. The Algerian authorities demand a special permit to gather for non-Muslim worship, however, despite having applied to the authorities multiple times, these churches are still awaiting a reply, let alone permission, to operate. The National Association of Protestant Churches, EPA (Eglise Protestante d'Algerie) has been registered in Algeria since 1974, but due to a 2012 change in the law, they were required to renew their registration. Even after eight years, the Algerian authorities have not renewed EPA's permit, refusing the application every time. Without this permission for EPA to operate, and the related closing of churches, Protestant churches are left with no places of worship.

Your Excellency, I believe that Algeria is a protector of the fundamental human rights. As the Algerian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion or belief for its citizens, I hope that by drawing your attention to these incidents, we will once again see all citizens of Algeria enjoy the right to peacefully practice their religion or belief.

I thus respectfully petition your intervention to ensure that:

- Hamid Soudad and others convicted under blasphemy laws are immediately released
- the Algerian authorities will do what they can to halt the ongoing closing of churches and re-open the ones that have already been closed down
- the authorities will accept the EPA's requests for renewal of the permit enabling them to meet for non-Muslim worship

Sincerely,