

Ambassador Mr. Mokaddem Bafdal  
Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Sigurd Syrs gate 2  
0273 Oslo

Your Excellency,

I am writing concerning the escalating serious violations of the freedom of religion and belief of Christians in Algeria. Currently, there are more than 12 Christians facing prosecution or are serving prison sentences on the grounds of their practicing and belonging to a religious minority. Algeria's constitution sets out specific protections of religious freedom at Article 51: "Freedom of conscience and freedom of opinion shall be inviolable. Freedom of worship shall be guaranteed and exercised without discrimination in compliance with the law. The State shall impartially guarantee the protection of places of worship." It is with great concern I would like to bring to your attention the increased violations of these constitutional protections by the authorities in recent years.

Since January 2018, 16 churches affiliated with the EPA (Église Protestante d'Algérie; an umbrella association of Protestant Churches in Algeria) have been forcibly sealed, while at least eight more churches have been ordered to close or threatened with closure. The authorities claim church buildings are used illegally for worship, since they lack permits per Ordinance 06-03, which stipulates a license must be obtained before using a building for non-Muslim worship. However, I have been informed that, despite numerous applications, not a single permit has been granted to a Protestant church since the Ordinance was enacted in 2006. Between February 2022 and mid-March 2022 alone, at least 6 churches were closed or have had proceedings issued against them for their closure.

More than 12 Christians are currently facing prosecution or are serving prison sentences on the grounds of their belief, among them are Farid Taglit, Arizgi Boudfouha and Abdelkader Hajmis who on 13 March 2022 were convicted of "Practicing worship without the prior opinion (or approval) of the National Commission for non-Muslim Worship". They each received 6-month prison sentences and fines of 50,000 DZD.

Recent weeks have seen an escalation in the targeting of Protestant churches, with proceedings commenced in the first week of February 2022 in Tizi Ouzou to close at least four churches. The situation of Christians is exacerbated further by the EPA's lack of legal status. The EPA has been officially registered in Algeria since 1974 but had to renew its registration following a change in the law in 2012. Algerian authorities have so far refused to renew the registration.

Your Excellence, I believe that the Algerian Government aims to respect the constitutional right of its citizens for religious freedom. However, these examples show that the Algerian authorities have not taken genuine steps to improve the situation of freedom of religion or belief in Algeria. I respectfully request your intervention to ensure that:

- all Christians prosecuted for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs be released immediately and unconditionally;
- all closed church buildings will be re-opened, current proceedings to close further churches will be withdrawn, and Christians be allowed to meet in their buildings for worship without undue restrictions.
- the EPA's registration application will be processed without delay, and in accordance with the law their registration renewed.

Sincerely,