

H.E. Mr Mokaddem Bafdal

## Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the status of freedom of religion or belief in Algeria.

On July 2 2023, Reverend Youssef Ourahmane was convicted to two years of imprisonment and a 100,000DA fine, after hosting a few families for three days in a church compound during a school holiday. He was charged with holding unauthorised religious assembly, and for worshipping in an unauthorised building. Ourahmane was not informed of the court hearing before mid-September and was convicted in absentia.

Ourahmane is a senior pastor of a Protestant church and the vice-president of the *Église Protestante d'Algérie*, an association representing the majority of Christian Protestant churches in the country. My concern is that the sentencing of Ourahmane is part of a broader trend of oppression and discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities in Algeria. In recent years, more than 95% of the Protestant churches have been sealed by the authorities or have been forced to shut down, and several Christians have been wrongfully convicted for having peacefully practised their religion.

Ourahmane has appealed against the charges, and the second hearing will take place in the court in Tizirt (Tizi Ouzou) on November 19. The charges against Ourahmane were based on the Ordinance to Regulate non-Muslim Worship, which was enacted in 2006. The Ordinance is in direct conflict with the Algerian constitution, which in Article 51 guarantees the freedom of religion or belief of all citizens. It is also in breach of International human rights treaties Algeria has ratified. Peacefully practising one's religion should not form the basis for charges.

In light of these considerations, I kindly request your intervention in ensuring that:

- All charges are dropped against Youssef Ourahmane and all convictions annulled for other individuals convicted for peacefully practicing their religion;
- The government's systematic discrimination of Christians on the grounds of their faith is addressed and ceased.
- Churches that have been forced to close by the government directly or indirectly are allowed to reopen;
- The authorities renew the license of registration of the *Église Protestante d'Algérie*.

**Sincerely,**