

ALGERIA: Three Algerian churches allowed to reopen after protest campaign

Barnabas fund (12.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2JK4whF> – Three Algerian churches, which had been closed by officials in the north-western district of Oran, have been allowed to reopen.

Two churches, L'Oratoire in Oran city centre, and a village church in Layayda, were closed in February, after authorities claimed they did not have state approval. A third church in Ain Turk has been closed since November over claims its bookshop had been used to “illegally print gospels and publications intended for evangelism”.

The Algerian Protestant Churches Association, which has been campaigning against the closures, said the governor of Oran signed off on their reopening on 11 June 2018. “This is a reopening without conditions. Praise the Lord,” said a Barnabas contact. “We are grateful for your unwavering support in prayer.”

The association, which represents 45 churches, spoke out about an apparent increase in discrimination against Christians this year, after Algerian authorities launched a committee to carry out “safety inspections” of churches.

Algeria's Ministry of Religious Affairs claimed the churches were sealed off because they did not have approval and

therefore did not “meet standards required of a place of worship.” Claims church representatives vehemently denied.

This week, security services were removing the seals and handing the churches back over to their leaders and the local Christian community.

The number of Algerian Christians is estimated to be in the high tens of thousands. Christians are free to worship in Algeria, but church buildings must have official recognition, which can be difficult to obtain. Since November 2017, Christians have faced increasing persecution from the authorities, including the closure of their churches, police searches, and prosecutions for carrying Bibles or Christian materials.

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