

Algerian pastor decries church closure

World Watch Monitor (05.03.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2tjyxkP> – The leader of a Protestant church in Algeria's north-western town of Aïn Turk (15km from Oran city) has denounced the closure of his church four months ago.

Youssef Ourahmane founded the House of Hope church more than 20 years ago – in 1997 – but on 9 November, 2017, the local authorities closed down the church, claiming it had been used to “illegally print Gospels and publications intended for evangelism”.

The police notification also stated that the church didn't have state approval.

But Ourahmane, speaking on a video shared with World Watch Monitor, said the closure of the church was based on “false accusations”.

“God has done an amazing work through this ministry,” he said. “Unfortunately, the ‘enemy’ [the Devil] has not been happy. All these years he tried by all means to stop us, to slow us.

“But we believe that God is in control. He will not allow any hair to fall, without his will, from our head.”

Ourahmane also called on fellow Christians around the world to pray for his church.

Two other churches – L'Oratoire (The Oratory) in Oran's city centre, and a village church in Layayda (about 40km from Oran) – were also sealed off by police last week.

The police notifications again stated that the churches didn't have state approval.

Since December, 25 out of the 45 churches affiliated to Algeria's main Protestant Church body – the Protestant Church of Algeria (known as EPA, its French acronym) – have been visited by a committee of officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, national gendarmerie, intelligence department and fire brigade.

The churches were informed that the visits were aimed at checking compliance with safety regulations, and they were given three months' notice.

They were also advised to seek permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

On 21 February two churches (among the 25 which received notifications) in the city of Tizi Ouzou, in the eastern province of Kabylie, were asked "to cease all religious activities immediately".

EPA leaders called the closures “unjustifiable”. They noted that all the affected churches are affiliated with the EPA, which has been officially recognised by the government since 1974.

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