

Table of Contents

- ***Algerian pastor decries church closure***
 - ***Two more churches closed, others threatened***
 - ***'Intensified campaign' against Algeria's churches***
-

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.

Two more churches closed, others threatened

World Watch Monitor (01.03.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2Fo4ddq> - Local authorities in Algeria’s north-western city of Oran have closed two more churches amidst growing pressure on Christians in the Maghreb country.

The two churches – L’Oratoire (The Oratory) in Oran’s city centre, and a village church in Layayda (about 40km from Oran) – were sealed off by police on Tuesday, 27 February.

The police notification stated that the churches didn’t have state approval. The decision is not the first of its kind in Oran.

On 9 November 2017, another church in the town of Aïn Turk (15km from Oran) was also closed. The authorities claimed the church had been used to “illegally print Gospels and publications intended for evangelism”.

Since December, 25 out of the 45 churches affiliated to the main Protestant Church body in Algeria – 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.

On Saturday 24 February the EPA called for a week of prayer and fasting for the nation. In light of the increasing pressure, the World Evangelical Alliance has also called on the Algerian government “to ensure that the religious freedom of Christians is safeguarded in accordance with international law”.

Godfrey Yogarajah, Deputy Secretary-General of the WEA and head of its Religious Liberty Commission, added: “We also call on the government, in keeping with the country’s constitution, to take all steps necessary to guarantee the freedom of worship for all religious groups in the country.”

Growing pressure

Other forms of restriction have been also reported in recent weeks in Algeria.

On 13 December 2017, a French Christian, resident in Oran for several years, was denied re-entry to the country.

Pastor Louis Martinez, in his sixties, is affiliated with the French Reformed Church. He and his wife had been running a private French-language school.

According to Christian advocacy group Middle East Concern, Pastor Martinez was stopped at Oran Airport and asked to submit his residency permit, which had been recently issued and was valid for ten years, and then informed he must leave Algeria.

The authorities gave no reason for his deportation, MEC said. His wife was subsequently able to settle their family and business affairs in Algeria and has recently also left the country.

'Intensified campaign' against Algeria's churches



The Cathedral of Algiers. (Photo: World Watch Monitor)

World Watch Monitor (03.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2Eeci1u> - Churches and individual Christians in Algeria have faced increased restrictions in recent months, raising concerns that these pressures signal a "coordinated campaign of intensified action against

churches by the governing authorities”, according to Christian advocacy group [Middle East Concern](#).

On 19 December, three Christians were arrested in Chlef, 200km north-west of the capital, Algiers. According to MEC, they were visiting from the north-eastern town of Tizi Ouzou and had arranged to meet a contact at a café.

“Police entered the café, found they were in possession of Christian literature, and took them to the police station, where they were investigated at length”, MEC said.

“A local newspaper, known for its hostility to Christians, described the incident as a ‘foiled evangelism attempt’, accusing the Christians of working under the cover of humanitarian activities and of alluring young Muslims to convert by means of financial and travel inducements.”

MEC said the three Christians were released but “may face charges of proselytism”.

During the same week, two churches in the province of Bejaia, in the north-eastern region of Kabylie, were reportedly visited by a committee of officials from the ministry of religious affairs, fire brigade, national gendarmerie and intelligence department.

“The churches were informed that the visits were to check compliance with safety regulations,” Mec said. “The two buildings host meetings of eight church congregations in Bejaia. The result of the inspection is pending.”

In Ouargla in the south of Algeria, another church, which has been active for ten years, reportedly “received an order from the provincial Governor to cease all religious activities” following a buildings inspection on 14 December.

“Leaders were accused of lacking authorisation to use the building as a place of worship, and of failing to comply with safety requirements,” MEC said. “They were advised to seek permission from the ministry of religious affairs, and [told] that worship activities can only recommence three months after obtaining such permission.”

Previously, in November, a church and Christian-owned bookshop in the north-western town of Aïn Turk, near Oran, were forcibly closed, as World Watch Monitor reported.

According to MEC, another church training centre in Boudjemaa, in the Kabylie region, was visited by the police and has since halted its operations. The leaders are to be investigated next month.

“The affected churches are all affiliated to the Protestant Church of Algeria [l’Église Protestante d’Algérie, or EPA], officially recognised in 1974,” MEC reports. “The EPA questions the motives behind the inspection visits, and believes that the accusations leading to the church closures have been unfounded.”