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## Persecution of Ahmadis

**HRWF (31.10.2019) - "Ahmadis are particularly persecuted in Algeria as 'heretics' and 'apostates', and dozens of them have been sentenced to prison terms in the last few years."** This is a statement that Willy Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF) made at an academic conference titled "Ahmaddiya in a scholarly perspective" organized by the Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions and Humanism in Antwerp-Wilrijk (Belgium) on 24-25 October.

Here is the excerpt of the paper concerning Algeria that HRWF presented at that conference:

There are an estimated 2,000 Ahmadis in Algeria, according to the Ahmadi community. In 2015, they applied for registration, but they received a negative answer from the Algerian authorities the following year. Their refusal was based mainly on articles which give the authorities broad leeway to refuse authorization if they deem the content and objectives of a group's activities to violate Algeria's "fundamental principles" (*constantes nationales*) and values, public order, public morals, and the applicable laws and regulations."<sup>[1]</sup>

In line with this refusal, government ministers have made several public anti-Ahmadi statements. In October 2016, the Minister of Religious Affairs Mohamed Aissa described the Ahmadi presence in Algeria as of a "deliberate sectarian invasion" and declared that the government brought criminal charges against Ahmadis to "stop deviation from religious precepts." In February 2017, he stated that Ahmadis are damaging the very basis of Islam.<sup>[2]</sup>

In April, Ahmed Ouyahia, then chief of cabinet to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, said that "there are no human rights or freedom of religion" in the case of the Ahmadis, because

“Algeria has been a Muslim country for 14 centuries.” Furthermore, he called on Algerians to “protect the country from the Shia and Ahmadiyya sects.”<sup>[3]</sup>

It is in this general anti-Ahmadi climate that a wave of prosecutions started in June 2016 in the Blida governorate<sup>[4]</sup>, and spread to other areas. A year later, some 266 Ahmadis around the country had faced criminal charges<sup>[5]</sup> and, as of early 2017, their president, Mohamed Fali said around 50 more were in the dock<sup>[6]</sup>. The charges were as follows<sup>[7]</sup>:

- denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam, punishable by a prison term of three to five years and a fine of up to 100,000 Algerian dinars<sup>[8]</sup>, under article 144 of the penal code;
- participation in an unauthorized association, under article 46 of the Associations Law, punishable by a prison sentence of three to six months and a fine of 100,000 to 300,000 dinars;
- collecting donations without a license, under articles 1 and 8 of the decree 03-77 of 1977 regulating donations;
- conducting worship in unauthorized places, under articles 7, 12, and 13 of Ordinance 06-03 Establishing the Conditions and Rules for the Exercise of non-Muslim Religions;
- and possession and distribution of documents from foreign sources threatening national security, under article 96-2 of the penal code, punishable by up to three years in prison.

Some were also imprisoned for up to six months for allegedly representing a threat to the majority Sunni Muslim faith and plotting with foreign powers.

Several Ahmadis faced two or more trials, sometimes in different parts of the country.

Convictions and sentences were issued in more than 120 cases and ranged from three months to four years in prison.

A number of them were suspended from their public sector jobs because there were active court cases against them.

The President of the Ahmadi community, Mohamed Fali, is also particularly targeted. He was repeatedly charged and prosecuted in many cases across the country.

From February to May 2016, he spent three months in Chlef prison in provisional detention<sup>[9]</sup>.

On 28 August 2017, police came to his home in Ain Sefra, in the province of Naama, and arrested him on the basis of an in absentia judgment sentencing him to three years in prison. Two weeks later, he was additionally given a suspended sentence of six months in prison and a fine<sup>[10]</sup>.

As such, Fali was facing charges in six cases simultaneously and was either under investigation or on trial in five different Algerian cities.

#### Footnotes

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/04/algeria-stop-persecuting-religious-minority>

[2] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/22/algeria-new-trials-shake-ahmadi-minority>

[3] Ibid

[4] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/algeria-wave-of-arrests-and-prosecutions-of-hundreds-of-ahmadis/>

[5] [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/algerie/qui-sont-les-ahmadis-persecutes-en-algerie-qui-pronent-la-laicite\\_3058951.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/algerie/qui-sont-les-ahmadis-persecutes-en-algerie-qui-pronent-la-laicite_3058951.html)

[6] Ibid 1

[7] Ibid 1

[8] 1000 Algerian dinars (DZD) = 7.50 EUR

[9] <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/actualite/mohamed-fali-condamne-a-un-an-de-prison-ferme-276941/print/1>

[10] <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/474338/societe/algerie-fali-leader-ahmadi-condamne-libere-et-toujours-poursuivi-symbole-dun-acharnement-detat/>

## Ahmadiyya in scholarly perspective: Program

### Speakers

**Prof. dr. Brahim Layouss:** *Welcome*

**Prof. dr. Chris Vonck:** *Introduction 'A search for a Quran in the 50's'*

**Heiko Wenzel:** *Is Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat an Intolerant Version of Islam? A Dialogue with Hiltrud Schröter's Book on the Jamaat.*

**Sumera Tariq:** *The Two-Nation Theory and The Making of a Nation. Was Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad A Nation-Maker And Influenced the making of Pakistan?*

**Muhammed Haron.:** *Africa's Ahmadiyya Community: Its double-identity as a religious minority.*

**Dr. Idrees Ahmad:** *The history of the Ahmaddiya Muslim community.*

**John H. Hanson:** *The Ahmadiyya in Ghana: aspirational Muslims in a global community.*

**Willy Fautré (Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.):** *Persecution of the Ahmadis in Pakistan and other countries.*

**Sir dr. Iftikhar Ayaz:** *Ahmadiyya History - A Theological Point of View .*

**Dr. Ataul Wasih Tariq and Prof. Vasco Fronzoni** (Univ. Napoli Orientale): *Blasphemy, Ahmadiyya theology and positive legislation.*

**Prof. Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.:** *Heresy or Hyperbole. An Assessment of the Claim of "Prophethood" Attributed to the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement.*

**Pr. Maria d'Arienzo:** *Theory of sovereignty and power in the Ahmadiyya Community*

**Ahmad Najib Burhani:** *Ahmadiyya and Islamic Revivalism in the Twentieth Century Indonesia: A Neglected Contribution*

**Thierry Valle (Director of CAP/ Freedom of Conscience with UN ECOSOC status):** *Pro-Ahmaddiya Advocacy at the UN*

Organizers : Prof. Régis Dericquebourg, Prof. Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, Prof. Chris Vonck and Prof. Donald Westbrook.

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## Protestant church shut down in Algeria: 'They came bearing truncheons'

**Video:** <https://bit.ly/32109Ho>

**Exceptional 16-minute video on Facebook:** <https://bit.ly/2Wqqq5>

By Sarra Gira

France24 (29.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/32109Ho> - Algerian authorities have shutdown an alarming number of Protestant churches in the Kabylia region, home to the country's Berber minority, since October 15. While the government says this is because the churches weren't up to regulation, members of the community say they are being unfairly targeted.

Authorities shut down three Protestant churches on October 15 and 16 in the province (known as a "wilaya" in Algeria) of Tizi Ouzou, which is located in the northern Algerian region of Grande Kabylie. One of the churches, Plein-Évangile, is the largest Protestant church in the country. Quite a number of amateur videos documenting these closures were posted online, especially on the Facebook pages "Les Chrétiens en Algérie" ["The Christians in Algeria"] and "Église protestante d'Algérie" ["Protestant Church of Algeria"].

Protestant church-goers in Makouda, in Tizi Ouzou province, being kicked out of their church by local authorities in a live Facebook feed on October 15, 2019.

"They claimed that the church was not in compliance with regulation"

Idir (not his real name) is a member of the congregation at the Plein-Évangile Church in Tizi Ouzou. He was at the church when the authorities came to shut it down:

Three days prior, the police came and said that they were going to shut down the church under Waly's orders [Editor's note: Waly is the local prefect]. They said that the church was not in compliance with regulation.

Just after we finished services on October 16, about 20 police officers came to shut down our church. About 15 of us were still inside the building. We tried to talk to the officers but when that didn't work, we sat down inside and refused to leave. One of the police officers called the station for reinforcements. They came bearing truncheons.

"It's less about enforcing the law and more about trying to divide people"

In Algeria, protestant churches are governed by a February 2006 law "establishing the conditions and regulating the activities of non-Muslim places of worship". This ruling stipulated that non-Muslim religious groups can only operate with the authorisation of the National Commission of Religious Organisations, which is part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

However, the president of the Protestant Church in Algeria, Salaheddine Chalah, says that this law is actually used to make life difficult for protestants.

Since July 2018, authorities have shut down 13 churches in Kabylia-- five in Béjaïa and eight in Tizi Ouzou. The most recent wave of closures began about two weeks ago.

Since 2006, the authorities have made several threats to close our places of worship, under the pretext that the buildings aren't up to code. We've done work on the buildings to meet these security standards, such as making sure that there are no visible electric cables and installing fire extinguishers. One church in Oran was shut down last year but then opened again six months later after work had been done on the building.

We've never managed to get authorisation from the National Commission of Religious Organisations even though we've taken all of the necessary steps.

Demonstrators gathered on October 13 in Tizi Ouzou to protest against the closure of churches in Algeria and the 2006 law governing churches, which they believe is being used to bully the Protestant religious community.

It's less about enforcing the law and more about trying to divide people at a sensitive time [Editor's note: Since February, widespread protests have swept Algeria, leading to the resignation of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika on April 2.] The authorities are only shutting down Protestant churches, probably because the congregations of these churches are almost exclusively Algerian, unlike other churches, and we aren't afraid to express our religious beliefs.

"The protestant community is a dream target"

Church closures aren't the only clampdown on Algeria's Protestant community. Some protestants have also been prosecuted for proselytising, which is banned under the 2006 law.

Karima Dirèche, a researcher for CNRS, the largest governmental research organisation in France, has studied evangelical networks across North Africa:

The state uses a church's failure to meet building codes or get authorisation from the National Commission of Religious Organisations as an opportunity to shut it down.

However, it is important to look at this issue in light of Algeria's current political context. For the authorities, there is a strategic benefit to sowing discord amongst Algerians by focusing public attention on protestants and the Berber minority. It's a classic strategy for a regime to try to divide the population. The Protestant community is the perfect target for that aim.

They aren't the only target, however. The authorities have made a habit of harassing any group that falls outside of their definition of societal norms.

**"One reason that Protestant churches [especially evangelical ones] have become such a target is because their members make very public displays of their faith"**

One reason that Protestant churches [especially evangelical ones] have become such a target is because their members make very public displays of their faith. Other churches, which have long-established roots in Algeria, such as the Catholic church, hold fewer services and don't really evangelize-- and haven't for a long time. Some of them don't even accept converts.

However, evangelical churches, like the ones that were shut down, are founded on the ideas of proselytizing and preaching. Actually, one of the reasons that these new evangelical churches have been able to associate so closely with the historic Algerian Protestant church is because they tend to recruit so many new members. However, while the 2006 law upholds a person's right to convert to another religion, it bans proselytism.

Algerian Muslims who convert to evangelical Christianity tend to be drawn by the strong sense of community amongst the congregation as well as the possibility of an alternative model for society that the church offers.

Algerian society has really opened up in terms of religious diversity. While the government still discriminates against Christians, there isn't violence between religious communities.

The France 24 Observers team contacted the Ministry of Religious Affairs for comment but, for the time being, have received no response to our queries.

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## **Muslims reopen a Tizi-Ouzou church, closed by the authorities**

***For the first time in contemporary Algerian history, Muslims support Christians. The popular movement remains united against the regime's deceptions. Since January 2018, the authorities have put seals on 15 Christian places of worship.***

By Kamel Abderrahmani

AsiaNews (21.10.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2JanuzK> - Last Thursday morning, Algerian authorities put seals on the largest Protestant church in Algeria. The decision was made by the head of the Tizi-Ouzou (Tizi Wezzu) wilaya (prefecture) who in the recent past also attacked Ibadite Muslims in Ghardaïa (Tayerdayt) in southern Algeria.

Since churches opened, they have never been a problem, especially in this region known for its tolerance towards all beliefs. So, right after the start of the crackdown, Christians organised a sit-in in Tizi Ouzou to protest against the church closing. The sit-in was met with more repression, including the arrest of at least seventeen Christians.

Arbitrary closures and arrests have real political aims. Under Algeria's regime, nothing is done randomly! Given the events in Algeria since 22 February of this year and the determination of the Algerian people to get rid of the hybrid dictatorship that has ruled the country since independence, nothing could be clearer! What does this regime seek by focusing on religious issues and freedom of conscience amid a popular revolution? This is the question sparked by church closures in Tizi Ouzou and the arbitrary repression the Christian community is subjected to.

Algeria's political regime, faced with a grassroots movement for nine months, has tried, is trying and will try diversionary strategies to split the strong popular protest movement. Playing with cultural, religious and identity sensitivities is its favourite sport. After the ban on the Berber cultural emblem and the vain attempt to use religious speech in mosques, today it attacks the Christian community! In other words, this regime is maliciously exploiting everything it can to remain in power. Divide and rule is the only motto recognised by Algeria's military regime!

However, "the wind is turning," and Algerian society, like other societies in the world, is changing. It changes, realises, integrates new ideas and gets rid of those that are no longer valid. For the first time in the contemporary history of Algeria, Muslim citizens have reacted and supported Christian citizens. From early morning, lawyers have become involved, and their trips to police stations have borne fruit. All Christian detainees were released. In the afternoon, Muslims, in a sign of solidarity and awareness, reopened the closed church.

Indeed, ordinary citizens understand the regime's Machiavellian manoeuvres. "We will not forget the main demands of the People's Revolution; we will not accept to deviate and focus on other business. At the same time, we have no right to be fooled by the actions of those in power who deprive our fellow Christian citizens of their right to individual freedom and worship," political activists announced on their Facebook page.

This view is revealing and such ideas should be adopted by all Algerians because we must create a State where all citizens are equal, regardless of their religious beliefs. This State must ensure and guarantee individual freedoms. That is why Algerians are still taking to the streets with the aim of establishing the rule of law. And today (18 October) was the 35th Friday of the popular uprising against those who ruined the country, fuelled fundamentalism and sowed division among the children of the same people.

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## **Algiers closes another two churches: the reasons are still unknown**

***The two buildings are in the same province and are the Church of the Gospel of Tizi Ouzou and the Church of Makouda. Religious leaders: "We remain confident, the Lord is faithful!" Since January 2018, the authorities have sealed 15 Christian places of worship. "Muslim fellow citizens alongside the Christians".***

By Kamel Abderrahmani

AsiaNews (17.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2W2lvmt> - Since February 22nd, Algerians have been on the streets protesting against the dictatorial regime. The latter has shown no qualms in toying with identity sensitivity to divide and fragment the popular movement that led to Bouteflika's resignation and continues to destabilize his Machiavellian plans.

The regime has already tried to exploit the imams, to convince people that the demonstrations are illicit from a religious point of view – but this has failed; it has imprisoned several activists for the display of the Berber flag and the Amazigh emblem [a term with which the native population defines itself], represented as a danger to national unity.

Yesterday the government, which has no legitimacy in the eyes of the Algerians, has decided to close the largest Protestant religious building in Algeria - the Church of the Gospel of Tizi Ouzou (capital of the northern province of the same name).

This community has existed for 23 years and has 1,200 faithful. According to representatives, yesterday, "the security services informed the leaders of the Church of Tizi Ouzou that they will proceed to close the place of worship. We remain confident, the Lord is faithful! "

It should be noted that the same fate occurred in the Church of Makouda, located in the same province: the faithful received the closing order by Tuesday 15 October. On the same day, the national guard sealed the structure.

The Ministry of the Interior gave no reasons for this arbitrary decision. In fact, it is not the first time that the political system attacks churches, accuses them of "planning a new strategy to implement hostile plans, with the support of foreign actors" and taking advantage of the political situation in the country.

From January 2018, 15 churches have been shut down for unknown reasons. In reality, such closures are nothing but an attempt to push people to violence, since the pacifism of demonstrations unnerves this regime. In other words, the soldiers - who hold real power in Algeria - wanted to create a context of violence that would justify a state of emergency. This means prohibiting demonstrations.

In Bejaia, a town near Tizi Ouzou, the church's religious leaders gathered with posters that mention the name and where their community is located. With banners and songs, they wish to appeal to public opinion: some places of worship remain closed by the authorities. They simply call for the reopening of their churches, as required by the Algerian Constitution.

The Christians of Algeria live in difficult times; we Muslim fellow citizens must remain at their side, support them and show that they are our brothers and Algerians in their own right. Together, we must resist those who want to divide us to govern more easily.

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## **Christians in Algeria hit with more church closures**

### ***Police seal building without advance notice.***

Morning Star News (26.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2IMyeo7> - Authorities today sealed shut a church building in Tigzirt, Algeria, two days after shutting another building serving two churches without prior notice, sources said.

Acting on orders from the governor of Tizi-Ouzou Province, eight police officers arrived at 11:45 a.m. on Tuesday (Sept. 24) at the Church of Boghni building and sealed the doors and windows of the Protestant church building in Boghni, 35 kilometers (21 miles) southwest of the city of Tizi-Ouzou, pastor Tahar Chergui said.

"I was surprised when one of the police officers contacted me to meet them at the site where our church is," Pastor Chergui told Morning Star News. "I had not received any notice; they went straight to proceed with the closure by sealing. They could have warned us before; why didn't they?"

The building serves the 190 members of Pastor Chergui's church as well as another Protestant church serving nearly 200 people from Assi-Youcef village, he said.

Officers posted a notice on the building indicating that it was closed due to lack of registration under Algeria's 2006 law on non-Muslim worship: "We, the police of Boghni, inform the whole population of Boghni that the premises illegally used by the named Tahar Chergui [address] to celebrate non-Muslim worship was closed and sealed by order of the governor dated Sept. 18, 2019. Signed by the president of district security."

The 2006 law, known as Law 06/03, stipulates that churches must obtain permission from a national committee to be registered, but the body has failed to consider or approve any applications, according to advocacy group Middle East Concern (MEC).

Pastor Chergui's church and the Assi-Youcef congregation that meets in the same building on Saturdays are affiliated with the legally recognized umbrella organization of Protestant churches in Algeria, the Protestant Church of Algeria or EPA, for l'Église Protestante d'Algérie.

The Church of Boghni began in 1995 and serves people from eight surrounding villages. "This closure raises the number of sealed church buildings affiliated with the EPA to eight," reads a MEC press statement issued before the closure of the Tizirt church. "Another four church groups have been ordered to cease all activities. In at least two cases, authorities have pressured the landlords renting to churches to deny Christians access to the premises."

A sealed church building in the city of Oran had re-opened, but on Aug. 8 the governor of Oran Province filed a complaint protesting its reopening and ordered that it be closed again. Church of Oran pastor Rachid Seighir said he plans to appeal the decision.

### ***Church Building Sealed Today***

Gendarmerie also surprised the church in Tizirt, announcing on Wednesday (Sept. 25) that the Church of Tizirt building would be closed soon. Gendarmes arrived today (Sept. 26) and sealed it, sources said. Tizirt is in northeast Algeria in Tizi-Ouzou Province.

The church building also served as a Bible school affiliated with the EPA.

"They told us that they are giving us time to clear useful objects out before they come back to seal it," church leader Ali Zerdoud told Morning Star News on Wednesday (Sept. 25). "I can only say one thing: This is an injustice."

The church of 70 mainly elderly members began in 2015, after the Bible school started in 2013. The school was to start classes in early October.

Since November 2017, "building-safety committees" have visited most EPA-affiliated churches and inquired about licenses required by the 2006 law regulating non-Muslim worship, according to MEC.

Islam is the state religion in Algeria, where 99 percent of the population of 40 million are Muslim. Since 2000, thousands of Algerian Muslims have put their faith in Christ. Algerian

officials estimate the number of Christians at 50,000, but others say it could be twice that number.

Algeria ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2019 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian, up from 42nd place the previous year.

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## **A young Christian fined in Akbou**

**FHRWF (01.07.2019) - On 27 June, a young Christian from Akbou was condemned to pay a fine of 50 000 DA for the «exercise of a non-Muslim religion without authorization». At a hearing held by the court of the same city on 29 May, the prosecutor had requested a two-year prison sentence.**

On 17 October 2018, the gendarmerie sealed the church named « Ville de Refuge » closed. This church was linked to the officially recognized Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) since it was opened in 2013. After that closure, the accused installed a big tent so that local Christians could hold religious services on Sunday.

On 16 May 2019, he was summoned by the judge for practising a religion without any authorization. Human rights activist and lawyer Sofiane Ikken declared to El Watan that freedom of worship is guaranteed by article 42 of the Constitution and this trial violates this provision. "This system of authorization is just a means of pressure to better control those believers and drive them underground to prepare prosecution", he said.

The EPA has declared that the closure of the church in Akbou, in the Kabylie province of Bejaia, was abusive and unfounded. The owner of the land being used by the Christian group has been charged for allowing unauthorized worship on his property, allegedly violating a 2006 Ordinance that regulates non-Muslim worship. The church involved has about 400 attendees.

Since November 2017 most EPA-affiliated churches have been visited by so-called "building-safety committees", which also ask for permits required for non-Muslim worship by the 2006 Ordinance. However, the government has yet to issue any license for a church building under this regulation.

The congregation in Akbou was visited by a "committee" in December 2017 which found safety code violations and ordered the church to close. The church has since rectified all the violations mentioned.

Several churches have since received written orders to cease all activities. A number were closed by authorities because they did not have a license, most recently in July 2018. Three of those closed churches have since been allowed to re-open.

Sources:

El Watan

<https://www.elwatan.com/regions/kabylie/bejaia/culte-un-jeune-chretien-condamne-aakbou-23-06-2019>

Middle East Concern

<https://meconcern.org/2019/04/30/algeria-two-upcoming-court-cases/>

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## Ramadan: Violence against those who do not fast

By Kamel Abderrahmani

Asia News (13.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2W1uVB0> - **People modify social customs, clothing and food during the holy month. For those who abstain from food, eating, drinking and smoking in public are a form of provocation. In Algeria, the law imposes fines and jail for those who offend the precepts of Islam. Two young people speak out claiming their individual freedom. One, Sarah, was forced to be hypocritical. Saudi Crown Prince calls for respect for non-fasters.**

*Those who do not fast during Ramadan are the subject of discrimination, even persecution, in most countries where Islam is the state religion. However, intolerance finds no justification in Qur'anic sources or in the hadiths, this according to Kamel Abderrahmani. Here are the thoughts of the young Muslim scholar and the personal stories he gathered. (Translation by AsiaNews)*

The Muslim world recently welcomed the month of fasting, which is a holy month in Islam and is the fourth pillar according to Sunni Islam. This month is characterised by modified social habits, clothing and food. However, as every year, non-fasters in most countries where Islam is the state religion become public enemy No. 1. Those who do not fast have no right to continue to live like the other eleven months of the year. They are pursued by others, beaten and despised with impunity!

During this month, fasters develop a sort of hostility and animosity towards Muslims who do not fast and also towards members of religious minorities. As an Algerian, I would like to talk mainly about this merciless pursuit against the latter in the name of morals, driving some young people, and I am one of them, to open Facebook pages to fight against this abusive behaviour towards these groups. One famous page is called *Chroniques de non-jeûneurs algériens* (News about non-fasting Algerians), and it was quickly reported by obscurantist forces, yet it continues to publish the personal stories of non-fasting Algerians.

I have long vetted Qur'anic sources and hadith texts about fasting to see if there is a religious basis that could explain this behaviour and intolerance towards non-fasters or a possible religious sanction that we can apply against them! Surprise, surprise! No text speaks of it! In fact, the issue is cultural, about dogmatism, not religion.

To justify their violence against those who do not observe Ramadan, fasters advance completely foolish and ridiculous arguments. For Muslims who observe fasting, eating, drinking and smoking publicly is a kind of provocation against them, an impoliteness, a lack of manners! This prompts me to seriously ask myself a question! Is going after the non-fasting, for example, a form of respect, an act of love and tolerance and above all a sign of a good manners?

The month of Ramadan as it is practiced today is like a kind of folklore imposing social norms that should be respected by everyone. The fact that people – including those who are permitted by the religion not to fast, like the sick or travellers – publicly break the fast is seen as a transgression of these norms and Ramadan folk laws. The latter generate a kind of psychological high among fasters. In short, no one has the right not to participate and everyone must make sure not to break this psychic "atmosphere"!

To clarify the situation a bit, one has to look at what the law says. Indeed, there is no text that forces Algerians or foreigners to fast. However, non-fasters who eat publicly may be convicted under Article 144 bis 2 of the Algerian Penal Code. The first paragraph of this article states that "whoever offends the prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) and the envoys of God or denigrates the dogmas or the precepts of Islam, whether in writing, drawing, statements or any other means is punishable by imprisonment of three (3) years to five (5) years and a fine of fifty thousand (50,000) dinars to one hundred thousand (100,000) dinars, or only one of these two penalties".

Thus, not observing Ramadan could be considered a denigration of one of the precepts of Islam and that is why, in my opinion, the law remains ambiguous. Moreover, how else can we explain the forced closure of cafeterias and restaurants during the day. What is more, every year, non-fasters are arrested and sentenced,[1] like in 2010, 2013 and 2017. The reasons for the convictions are related to this article and to Article 2 of the Algerian constitution.[2]

All this social pressure and the absence of a law that protects non-fasters put them in a dangerous situation that can imperil their security and individual freedom. For Sarah, "It's a daily struggle". The young Algerian woman doctor from Oran has not fasted for two years. "I am being hypocritical all day and pretending to observe the fast. That's why I do not feel myself." She adds that she "had a 'a ha' moment in her life and no longer believes in the Islam practised nowadays", but "I have to keep quiet to avoid problems with my family, society and also with the State."

The second young person who has agreed to speak out is Abdelaziz Lazreg,[3] a young student at the Philosophy Department in Algiers, a rebel against the backward thinking that reigns in the country. On the second day of Ramadan, he rebelled against the department's administration for closing coffee vending machines. "What this administration has done is inadmissible and it is an attack on individual liberty. We have foreign students at the university who are not Muslims and who have to continue their life like the other months of the year. In any case, I myself do not fast and I am not a Muslim and I have the right to feel free, to live in safety and to be protected by the law because I am first and foremost an Algerian citizen, but our State does not do anything for us minorities, so I have to rebel and wrest my freedom to be what I fully am."

Unlike Algeria, which seems to be faithful to the Wahhabism imported into this country in the 1980s and 1990s and which has since become more established, Saudi Arabia has taken an incredible step in this area and without any legal ambiguity. According to a memo[4], rumoured to be from the Interior Ministry, MbS says non-fasters should be respected and not harmed. This memo, of course published in Arabic and intended for the Saudi vice police, concerns people who do not observe the fast and break it either in secret or in public. It says that this decision is consistent with a modern vision of Islam, respect for human rights and Vision 2030 advocated by the Crown Prince Mohammed ben Salman. In fact, the greatest preacher of Wahhabism and one of the emblematic figures of Salafist Islam just apologised to all those he misled by steering them to embrace Wahhabism.[5] Is that enough? In which direction is the Muslim world going?

### Sources:

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[2] Jahus, "Constitution de la République algérienne démocratique et populaire (texte intégral)", ObservAlgérie, 26 March 2019, <https://www.observalgerie.com/laune/constitution-republique-algerienne-democratique-populaire/#2>. Retrieved on 13 May 2019.

[3] Abdelaaziz Lazreg, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100004522716807>. Retrieved on 13 May 2019.

[4] Statement attributed to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: the abolition of the penalty of breakfast in Ramadan (in Arabic), al-hadath, 8 May 2019, <https://www.alhadath.ps/article/98617>. Retrieved on 13 May 2019.

[5] "Cleric Faces Backlash for Claiming Saudi Arabia Represents True, Moderate Islam", Morocco World News, 8 May 2019, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/05/272614/cleric-saudi-arabia-aid-alqarni-moderate-islam/>. Retrieved on 13 May 2019.

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## **Upcoming hearing of the owner of the land of a Protestant church in Kabylia**

Middle East Concern (30.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2ZNMbsI> - On 16 May there will be a hearing in the case against the owner of land being used by a church in the Kabylie province of Bejaia. He has been charged with allowing unauthorized worship on his land, violating a 2006 Ordinance that regulates non-Muslim worship.

The church involved is the "Ville de Refuge" congregation in the village of Azaghar, about 180 km south-east of Algiers. Active for more than five years, it has about 400 attendees and is a member of the EPA (Église Protestante d'Algérie), the legally recognised umbrella of Protestant churches in Algeria.

Since the church was sealed by the police on 16 October 2018 it has been meeting in a tent erected on the property. The owner of the tent was summoned several times by the authorities, and asked to dismantle the tent, but the church has continued to meet.

Since November 2017 most EPA-affiliated churches have been visited by so-called "building-safety committees", which also ask for permits required for non-Muslim worship by the 2006 Ordinance. However, the government has yet to issue any license for a church building under this regulation.

The congregation in Azaghar was visited by a "committee" in December 2017 which found safety code violations and was ordered to close. The church has since rectified all the violations mentioned.

Several churches have since received written orders to cease all activities. A number were closed by authorities because they did not have a license, most recently in July 2018. Three of those closed churches have since been allowed to re-open.

In a separate incident, the leader of the Church in Makouda, in the province of Tizi Ouzou, was verbally informed he will be charged for violations of the building plans. This church is the second-largest Protestant congregation in Algeria. The pastor has submitted documentation showing the building is suitable for public meetings.

In November 2018, in a similar case a court ordered the church of Ait Djemaa, 35 km south of Tizi Ouzou to close. The court judgement stated that an affiliation with the EPA cannot replace a permission by a building safety committee.

Another Christian, Nourredine Belabed, was sentenced on March 8 to a fine of 100,000 dinars (US\$868) and a suspended three-month prison sentence under the 06/03 law and awaits appeal in Tiaret.

Algeria ranked 42nd on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

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