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Release members of Ahmadi religious minority

Amnesty International (12.06.2022) - <https://bit.ly/39IoXhl> - Algerian authorities must immediately and unconditionally release, and drop all charges against, three members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, who were arrested earlier this week solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion, said Amnesty International today.

The authorities must also drop all charges against 21 other members of the group who are currently released pending investigation.

On 6 June 2022, the First Instance Tribunal in Bejaia charged the 24 men who identify as members of the Ahmadi religious group with 'participation in an unauthorized group' and 'denigrating Islam', under Article 46 of the Law on Associations and Article 144 bis 2 of the Algerian Penal Code, respectively. The judge ordered the immediate detention of three members and released the others pending further investigation. Their lawyer appealed this decision on 8 June.

"The Algerian authorities have legal obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right to freedom of religion of everyone in the country which includes those with religious beliefs that are different to the majority. It is outrageous that a group of people find themselves behind bars simply for practising their faith or for their beliefs," said Amna Guellali, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Algerian authorities must immediately and unconditionally release the three detained men and drop all charges against them and the 21 other members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light."

Redouane Foufa, the coordinator of the group of religious members in Bejaia, told Amnesty International before his arrest that the Algerian authorities have been intimidating and harassing the group in Bejaia since April 2022. They interrogated them about their religious beliefs and confiscated their passports, phones and laptops on 2 April. They returned their passports on 7 June but kept their electronic devices.

On 5 June, police in Bejaia held the 24 members of the group for 13 Hours. They interrogated the adults and took their photographs and fingerprints.

According to Nadia Saliba, a group member and wife of detainee Khireddine Ahman, one officer said they are traitors of Islam and do not deserve rights as citizens. The members of the group were told they would appear in court the next morning and that their children were prohibited from attending Algerian schools until next year.

On 6 June, the group of 24 spent 14 hours in court before three of them — Redouane Foufa, the coordinator of the movement in Bejaia, and two other members, Khireddine Ahman and Cherif Mohamed Ali — were charged and sent to Bejaia’s Oued Ghir prison.

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light was established in 1993. It follows the teachings of Imam Mahdi and believes in Imam Ahmed al-Hassan as its divine guide. There are currently an estimated 70 members in Algeria.

According to Hadil El Khouly, a spokesperson for the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, the members of the group in Bejaia have been interrogated by police a total of ten times over the past three months.

In an interview with Amnesty International before his arrest, Redouane Foufa said that around 30 soldiers had previously searched the house he shares with the members of the group and seized documents such as ID cards and passports, as well as phones and laptops.

Yousra Bezai, another member of the religious minority group, told Amnesty International: “We were living peacefully in our home. We never tried to take our beliefs outside. It is them who came to us and violated our privacy and our rights.”

Photo : Members of the Ahmadi religious group (Photo: Private)

Algerian Christians receive reduced fine for “unauthorized worship”

Persecution.org - International Christian Concern (09.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3wdlQg5> - A group of 11 Algerian Christians, originally arrested at the end of 2021, received a reduced sentence fine for “unauthorized worship” on April 28. The 11 Algerians, plus one French guest speaker, gathered in Tizi-Ouzou on December 4 for an event.

The police raided the gathering and arrested everyone for unauthorized non-Muslim worship, including the Christian who owned the space that was rented out. A judge sentenced the group to six months suspended sentence and a fine of 200,000 dinars (about \$1440 USD). The French national paid the fine and then immediately left the country. The remaining Christians appealed in court on April 14 and received a verdict on April 28 that reduced the fine to 100,000 dinars but retained the suspended prison sentence.

Another Algerian Christian, located in Ain El Hamam, was acquitted twice, most recently on March 24. Authorities charged the pastor with unauthorized worship in his home and unauthorized broadcasting on social networks in January. Despite doing both for many years, he suddenly faced persecution for his evangelistic efforts. The Christian man was acquitted and, after the prosecution appealed, acquitted again in March.

Algerian authorities severely restrict the ability of Christians to worship in the country, including the [closure of churches](#) and the arrest of Christians living out their faith.

Photo : istock.org

