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## **A UN Special Rapporteur meets members of Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light**

***In August, CAP/ Liberté de conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers had jointly sent a documented report to the situation of that Muslim new religious movement and asked him to meet their members. He did!***

[Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light](#) (24.09.2023) - Members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in Algeria met today with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, during his official visit to Algeria from 16 to 26 September 2023.

The Special Rapporteur who is conducting the visit in order to assess Algeria's compliance with the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association was keen on meeting with persecuted religious minorities in Algeria to learn about the challenges they face in exercising their right to freedom of religion and freedom of association. On the 6th of June 2022, 18 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in Algeria were charged with "participating in an unauthorized group" and "denigrating Islam". On the 20th of September 2022, the Court of Bejaia sentenced Redouane Foufa, Khireddine Ahman, and Cherif Mohamed Ali to one year in prison and the rest of the group to six months in prison, with fines. After Amnesty International's public campaign on the case, the sentence was overturned by the High Court of Bejaia. Despite this, a religious decree declaring the group to be heretics was still in effect and the court outlawed any further gathering of the group.

During today's visit, members of the faith in Algeria spoke about the denial of their right to proclaim their faith and the crackdown by Algerian authorities against them, amid imminent threats to their lives and safety, after the authorities declared them to be apostates who are outside of Islam. They have reiterated their demand to practice their faith freely and to safely proclaim their belief in the Riser of the Family of Mohammed Aba Al-Sadiq Abdullah Hashem, in full protection of their right to life.

CAP/ Liberté de Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers, two NGOs active in Brussels, had addressed a report to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Peaceful Assembly and Association before his fact-finding mission in Algeria detailing the persistent religious persecution against members of the faith in Algeria. The report can be read [HERE](#).

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light would like to thank CAP/ Liberté de Conscience, Human Rights Without Frontiers and Hadil El-Khouly for their efforts in making today's meeting happen.

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## Religious freedom to be on the agenda of a UN Special Rapporteur before his fact-finding mission

HRWF/ CAP (14.09.2023) - CAP/ Liberté de Conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers, two NGOs active in Brussels, are deeply concerned about the situation of the members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in Algeria and have addressed a report to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Peaceful Assembly and Association before his fact-finding mission in Algeria planned from 6 to 16 September.

On the 6th of June 2022, 18 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in Algeria were charged with "participating in an unauthorized group" and "denigrating Islam".

The First Instance Tribunal in Bejaia charged them under Article 46 of the Law on Associations and Article 144 bis 2 of the Algerian Penal Code. The judge ordered the immediate detention of three members, while the other 15 were released and were placed under house arrest pending further investigation.

### **Prison sentences for 18 members of the faith**

On the 20th of September 2022, the Court of Bejaia sentenced **Redouane Foufa, Khireddine Ahman and Cherif Mohamed Ali to one year in prison and the rest of the group to six months in prison, with fines.**

The court verdict further confirmed that a religious decree was issued against the group by the council of religious affairs in the county of Bejaia on the 6th of April 2022. The decree held the group to be "*a misguided group who are heretics and are out of the Islamic faith.*" It further stated that the tenants of faith of the group are "*a clear and direct violation of the laws of the true Islamic faith as stated clearly in the Holy Qur'an and the prophetic narrations*". The verdict cited specifically the following tenants of the faith as blasphemous:

- The belief in Abdullah Hashem Aba Al-Sadiq, the leader of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light to be the legitimate successor of Prophet Mohammed and the awaited Mahdi in Islam.
- The abrogation of the five daily prayers and that there is no specific ritual for it.
- The month of Ramadan is set in December of every year.
- The Kaaba, Islam's holiest site to be in Petra, Jordan, and not in Mecca.

### **Redouane Foufa, the main target**

The peaceful assembly of the group was specifically condemned in the court verdict, as it went on to elaborate how the group gathered in a house rented by Redouane Foufa, the coordinator of the group in Algeria, to discuss the teachings of a heretic religion - an action that the court deemed to be criminal and punishable under Article 46 of the Law on Associations.

Amnesty International has monitored the case and issued several press releases calling for the release of the group and that all charges against them be dropped<sup>[1]</sup>. In its press releases, Amna Guellali, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle

East and North Africa said: *"It is a travesty of justice that these individuals are being detained or prosecuted over their religious beliefs."*

Prior to their arrest, Redouane Foufa and the other members of the community reported being subjected to constant harassment and intimidation by the authorities in their place of residence in Bejaia since April 2022. Over a period of three months, the members of the group in Bejaia were interrogated by police a total of ten times. In one such incident, the house where Redouane Foufa and the families were living was raided by around 30 soldiers, who stormed the house and went through the personal and private belongings of the families, seizing documents such as ID cards and passports, as well as phones and laptops.

### **Repeated police interrogation**

On 5 June 2022, police in Bejaia held the group for 13 hours, including six children and three elderly members. They were held in extremely hot temperatures and were denied access to food or water.

The investigation focused particularly on the point of the group's gathering in the Bejaia house, accusing the women of immorality and that the group was running a brothel in the Bejaia house.

In an interview about their arrest, Youssra Bezai, another member of the group said: *"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."*

The 18 adult members were told they would appear in court the next morning. During this interrogation which lasted another 14 hours, the group reported being threatened either to give up their faith or be sent to jail. After that the whole group was charged, and three of them — Redouane Foufa, and two other members, Khireddine Ahman, and Cherif Mohamed Ali <sup>[2]</sup>— were sent to Bejaia's Oued Ghir prison.

During the five-months duration of the house arrest, the persecution against the other 15 members at the Bejaia house continued.

### **Pressed to give up their faith in prison**

The three members who were in prison for the duration of the 5 months were subjected to various human rights violations, ill-treatment, and discrimination while in jail. The heads of all three were shaved, and they were put in solitary confinement with copies of the Qur'an and with daily visits from prison administration preaching to them and asking them if they had 'repented'.

Prison guards instigated other inmates against them telling them they are "apostates". They were strip-searched and were also subjected to extreme medical negligence. Redouane got a blood infection that spread from his arm to his back and received no medical treatment. This was followed by contracting COVID and then suffering a heart attack. If it wasn't for the other two members shouting for help, Redouane would have died.

### **Released from prison but...**

After Amnesty International's public campaign on the case, the sentence was overturned by the High Court of Bejaia, dropping the charges and releasing the group. **Despite this, the religious decree was still in effect and the court outlawed any further gathering of the group.** Redouane Foufa reported in a video testimony that the day he

was released from jail he was threatened not to speak about this case or his faith, and to not gather with any other members of the faith, or else he would be immediately sent back to prison. He was also ordered to vacate the Bejaia house. All business activities and records of Redouane and his wife were canceled by the chamber of commerce after his release, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs got in touch with previous employers and family members of the group ordering them to boycott the group on the basis of a standing religious decree stating they are "infidels."

The religious decree which gave effectively a green light for possible vigilante violence, forced the group to flee Algeria and seek international protection in Europe where they could practice their faith freely.

### ***In search of asylum in the EU through Turkey***

They fled to Turkey in December 2022 and 15 of them<sup>[3]</sup> attempted to legally seek asylum in Bulgaria, together with other members of the faith who had fled to Turkey as well due to severe persecution in other Muslim-majority countries.

These countries are Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Palestine, and Thailand. The whole group involving 101 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light were violently pushed back by Turkish authorities, beaten with batons, and detained, before being transferred to the Edirne Removal Center where they are in de facto detention for the past 60 days, suffering horrendous ill-treatment and grave human rights violations.<sup>[4]</sup> Deportation orders were issued against them to return them to their countries of origin, subjecting them to further persecution and violations of their rights, including the right to be free from torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, and their right to life.

The most famous asylum-seeker stuck in Turkey is **Redouane Foufa**, the leader of the Algerian group. He would like to find a safe haven in France but he is now kept in the Immigration Detention Center of Edirne in Turkey.

### ***15 Algerian members of the faith detained in Turkey***

The 15 Algerians who had just successfully fled Algeria for religious persecution found themselves in detention again, this time in Turkey, denied their human rights because of their faith, and unable to safely practice their religion.

The severity of the human rights abuses enacted upon the group in the Edirne removal center is amplified by the extreme vulnerabilities among the detained members - 22 children aged from 1 to 17, at least 27 elderly or sick adults, and LGBTQ members.

Soumaya Foufa - a 58-year-old LGBTQ member from Algeria - fears persecution in Turkey for its crackdown on LGBTQ members. She also fears for her life if returned to Algeria. The case has also received **considerable attention by the press**,<sup>[5]</sup> including lodging an interim measure request at the European Court of Human Rights<sup>[6]</sup>. The case is also being **monitored by United Nations experts**: the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, the UN Working Group on arbitrary detention and the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues are monitoring the case and have issued a public collective statement in its respect.<sup>[7]</sup>

The 15 Algerian members are now appealing against deportation orders and are in search of a safe haven in the EU where they can seek international protection and can practice their faith freely. They have family members in France and are looking for ways to apply for asylum there.

**The coordinator of the religious group is Hadil El-Khouly, based in London. She can be contacted by email ([hadil.elkhouly@gmail.com](mailto:hadil.elkhouly@gmail.com)) or telephone (+44 7443 106804) for direct contacts with members of the Ahmadi Religion in Algeria.**

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## **Footnotes**

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/algeria-release-members-of-ahmadi-religious-minority/> and <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/algeria-drop-all-charges-against-members-of-a-religious-minority/>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/redouane-foufa>, <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/khireddine-ahman>, and <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/cherif-mohamed-ali>

<sup>[3]</sup> The names of the 15 members are: Asloune Nedjma, Belfiroud Ali, Belfiroud El Mehdi, Belfiroud Mohamed, Benabdelmoula Fatima Zohra, Bensalah Ines Sabrina, Bensalah Rania, Bezai Youssra, Foufa Maryam, Foufa Redouane, Foufa Soumia, Habibi Mohammed Boudjelal, Lombarkia Rafik, Mazouzi Rabha, Salma Mihoub

<sup>[4]</sup> For footage of the violence at the border see <https://www.eureporter.co/world/turkey/2023/05/24/over-100-church-members-beaten-and-arrested-at-the-turkish-border/>. Also see statement of the Border Violence Monitoring Network <https://borderviolence.eu/reports/follow-up-statement-on-the-situation-of-the-ahmadi-religious-group-in-turkey/>

<sup>[5]</sup> Among others, see BBC Radio interview ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYoTa2PC\\_64](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYoTa2PC_64)), EU Observer (<https://euobserver.com/migration/157200>), EU Reporter (<https://www.eureporter.co/world/turkey/2023/05/24/over-100-church-members-beaten-and-arrested-at-the-turkish-border/>), European Times (<https://europeantimes.news/2023/05/hrwf-un-eu-osce-turkey-stop-deportation-ahmadis/>)

<sup>[6]</sup> Among others, see EU Reporter article (<https://www.eureporter.co/world/turkey/2023/07/15/ahmadi-religion-files-lawsuit-against-turkiye-at-european-court-of-hr-following-violent-pushback-at-turkey-border/>) and EU weekly news article (<https://euoweeklynews.com/2023/05/27/104-members-of-a-religious-minority-face-imprisonment-or-execution-on-the-turkish-bulgarian-border/>)

<sup>[7]</sup> Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/turkiye-must-not-deport-members-ahmadi-religion-peace-and-light-seeking>