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Their teachings are accused of "endangering the unity of the nation." It is a clear violation of international principles on freedom of religion or belief.

by Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (27.01.2025) - On December 2, 2024, the Tirzi Ouzou Court in Algeria has sentenced five Jehovah's Witnesses to two years of imprisonment plus a fine of 100,000 Algerian dinars "for the offense of inciting a Muslim to change religion and the offense of undermining national unity."

That the defendants spoke about religion with Muslims is probably true, although there is no direct evidence of that in the judgment, no evidence of conversion, and no witness who affirms it. The problem is that in Algeria, while speaking about religion is allowed, especially for Muslims, inciting people to change their religion is not allowed by the law. What makes a difference between speaking about religion and inciting to change one's religion? The distinction is so tight that it becomes easy for judges to arbitrarily switch from one to the other, to the detriment of innocent people, especially Christians. Some authorities may easily confuse both based on the corresponding Algerian statute of 2006. This Statute is also in violation of international principles of freedom of religion and belief, which include the right to proselyte and teach others about one's religion.

The idea that teaching a religion other than Islam may "undermine the national unity" of Algeria also derives from law 06-09 of 2006, which is both liberticide and inconsistent with international human rights principles. However, the Tirzi Ouzou decision is also based on a reconstruction of some teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses that is grossly inaccurate.

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