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### 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Algeria

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits state institutions from behaving in a manner that infringes on Islamic morals. The law grants all individuals the right to practice their religion if they respect public order and regulations. “Offending or insulting” any religion is a criminal offense. The law criminalizes blasphemy but not apostasy. Proselytizing to Muslims by non-Muslims is a crime.

At the end of the year, Ahmadi Muslim community leaders said 33 Ahmadi Muslims faced charges ranging from blasphemy to illegal fundraising. In November, a court sentenced five members of the Tizi Ghenif church to three years in prison and a fine for unauthorized worship and producing religious materials for distribution. In October, the same court sentenced Pastor Allahoum of the Ouacif church to two months in prison and a fine for opening a place of worship without authorization. Both cases were pending appeal. On February 1, the Supreme Court overturned on appeal the conviction of Said Djabelkhir, an Islamic scholar specializing in Sufism and a founder of the “Circle of Enlightenment for Free Thought,” of blasphemy. In 2021, Djabelkhir was convicted of blasphemy for “offending the precepts of Islam” and was sentenced to three years in prison, in addition to a fine.

Leaders of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) stated that six EPA-affiliated churches closed following either direct orders from the government or a decision by church leaders due to significant pressure from authorities. Only three EPA-affiliated churches remained open at the end of the year.

Some Christian leaders and congregants stated that non-Muslims faced social pressure for practicing a non-Muslim faith. Some individuals who engaged in religious practice other than Sunni Islam reported they had experienced threats and intolerance. Some local media outlets occasionally criticized Ahmadi Islam and Shia Islam as “sects” or “deviations” from Islam or as “foreign” and demonstrated a bias against the groups.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officers frequently met with senior government officials in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, Justice, and Interior to discuss religious tolerance and respect as well as religious freedom. Topics raised included the difficulties Ahmadis, Christians, and other minority religious groups faced in registering as associations, importing religious materials, and obtaining visas. The Ambassador routinely visited religious institutions and met with faith communities during her travels throughout the country. The Ambassador and other embassy officers focused on pluralism, religious tolerance, and respect in meetings with leaders from both Sunni Muslim and minority religious groups as well as with other members of the public. On March 27, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith iftar, bringing together participants from diverse faiths to discuss Algeria’s religious traditions and challenges faced by religious minorities. The embassy used special events, social media, and speakers’ programs to emphasize messages of religious respect and tolerance.

On December 29, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, the Secretary of State placed Algeria on the Special Watch List for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom.

## Section I.

### Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 46 million (midyear 2023), more than 99 percent of whom are Sunni Muslims following the Maliki school. Religious groups together constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Christians, Jews, Ahmadi Muslims, Shia Muslims, and a community of Ibadi Muslims who reside principally in Ghardaia Province. Religious leaders estimate there are fewer than 200 Jews and fewer than 200 Ahmadi Muslims.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, members of the EPA, Lutherans, members of the Reformed Church, Anglicans, and an estimated 1,000 Egyptian Coptic Christians. Religious leaders’ unofficial estimates of the number of Christians range from 20,000 to 200,000. According to government officials and religious leaders, foreign residents make up most of the Christian population. The Christian population includes students and immigrants from sub-Saharan

Africa. Christian leaders say citizens who are Christians predominantly belong to Protestant groups.

Christians reside mostly in Algiers and the provinces of Bejaia, Tizi Ouzou, Annaba, Ouargla, and Oran.

## Section II.

### Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

#### LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits state institutions from engaging in behavior incompatible with Islamic values. The constitution states, "The freedom of opinion is inviolable." Freedom of worship is provided if it is exercised in accordance with the law. "Offending or insulting" any religion is a criminal offense. The law criminalizes blasphemy but not apostasy. The law says the state must protect places of worship from any political or ideological influence.

The law does not prohibit religious conversion, including from Islam, but proselytizing to Muslims by non-Muslims is a criminal offense. The law provides a maximum punishment of one million dinars (\$7,500) and five years' imprisonment for anyone who "incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim to another religion; or by using establishments of teaching, education, health, social, culture, training institutions, or any financial means." Making, storing, or distributing printed documents or audiovisual materials with the intent of "shaking the faith" of a Muslim is also illegal and subject to the same penalties.

The law criminalizes blasphemy. The penal code provides punishment of three to five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 to 100,000 dinars (\$370 – \$740) for offending the Prophet Muhammad or other messengers of God or disparaging the dogma or precepts of Islam through writing, drawing, declaration, or any other means. The law also criminalizes insults directed at any other religion and prescribes the same penalties.

The law states all individuals have the right to practice their religion if they respect public order and regulations.

The constitution establishes a High Islamic Council and states the council shall encourage and promote *ijtihad* (the use of independent reasoning as a source of Islamic law for issues not precisely addressed in the Quran) and shall express opinions on religious questions presented for its review. The president of the republic appoints the members of the council and oversees its work. The constitution requires the council to submit regular reports to the president on its activities. A presidential decree further defines the council's mission as taking responsibility for all questions related to Islam, for correcting mistaken perceptions, and for promoting

the true fundamentals and correct understanding of the religion. The council may issue fatwas at the request of the president.

The law requires any civil society group, religious or otherwise, to register with the government as an association prior to conducting any activities. The law requires all organizations registered prior to 2012 to reregister. The National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship, chaired by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA), approves the registrations of religious groups, after a legal compliance review by the Ministry of Interior (MOI); only registered associations are officially recognized. Unregistered associations have no legal status and may not legally own property, open bank accounts, convene gatherings, or raise funds. Members of active, unregistered groups may be subject to criminal prosecution. The registration requirements for national-level associations stipulate the founding members must furnish documents proving their identities, addresses, and other biographic details; provide police and judicial records to prove their good standing in society; demonstrate the association has members residing in at least one quarter of the country's provinces to prove the association merits national standing; submit the association's general assembly document and financial statements signed by its president; and submit documents indicating the location of its headquarters.

The law requires the MOI to provide a receipt for an application once it has received all required documentation. The ministry has 60 days to respond to applicants following the submission of a completed application. If the ministry does not respond within the 60-day timeframe, the application is automatically approved, and the receipt may be used as proof of registration. If the ministry considers the application incomplete, it does not issue a receipt for the application. The law grants the government full discretion in making registration decisions but allows applicants to appeal a denial to an administrative tribunal. For associations seeking to register at the local or *wilaya* (provincial) level, application requirements are similar, but an association's membership and sphere of activity is strictly limited to the area in which it registers. An association registered at the *wilaya* level is confined to that specific *wilaya*.

The MRA has the legal responsibility to review registration applications of religious associations and assist non-Muslim communities with the registration process.

The law charges the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship with facilitating the registration process for all non-Muslim groups by gathering all relevant authorities into a single consultative committee. The commission, which meets on an ad-hoc basis, is composed of senior representatives of the Ministries of National Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs; the Presidency; national police; national gendarmerie; and the governmental National Human Rights Council (CNDH).

The constitution requires a presidential candidate to be Muslim. Under the law, non-Muslims may hold other public offices and work within the government.

The law prohibits religious associations from receiving funding from political parties or foreign entities without prior authorization from the government. The constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion. Membership in the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), an Islamist political party banned since 1992, remains illegal.

The law specifies the manner and conditions under which religious services, Islamic or otherwise, must take place. The law states that religious gatherings, for worship or other purposes, are subject to regulation, and the government may shut down any religious service taking place in private homes or in outdoor settings without official approval. Except for daily prayers, which are permissible anywhere, Islamic services may take place only in state-sanctioned mosques. Friday prayers are further limited to certain specified mosques.

Non-Islamic religious services must take place only in buildings registered with the state for the exclusive purpose of religious practice and be administered by a registered religious association, open to the public, and marked as such on the exterior. A request for permission to observe special non-Islamic religious events must be submitted to the relevant *wali* (governor) at least five days before the event, and the event must occur in buildings accessible to the public. Requests must include information on three principal organizers of the event, its purpose, the number of attendees anticipated, a schedule of events, and its planned location.

The wali may request the organizers move the location of an event or deny permission for it to take place if the wali deems it would endanger public order or harm "national constants," "good mores," or "symbols of the revolution." If unauthorized meetings go forward without approval, police may disperse the participants. According to the penal code, individuals who fail to disperse at the behest of police are subject to arrest and a prison term of two to 12 months.

The penal code states that only government-authorized imams, whom the state hires and trains, may lead prayers in mosques and penalizes anyone else who preaches in a mosque with a fine of up to 100,000 dinars (\$740) and a prison sentence of one to three years. Any persons, including government-authorized imams, who act "against the noble nature of the mosque" or in a manner "likely to offend public cohesion, as determined by a judge" may be fined as much as 200,000 dinars (\$1,500) or receive a prison sentence of three to five years. The law states that such acts

include using the mosque to achieve purely material or personal objectives or with a view to harming persons or groups.

The MRA provides financial support to mosques and pays the salaries of imams and other religious personnel as well as health care and retirement benefits. The law also provides for the payment of salaries and benefits to non-Muslim religious leaders who are citizens. The Ministry of Labor regulates the amount of an individual imam's or mosque employee's pay and likewise sets the salaries of registered non-Muslim religious groups' religious leaders who are Algerian citizens, based on their position within their individual churches.

The Ministries of Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Commerce must approve the importation of all printed materials, including religious texts and items, except those intended for personal use. Authorities generally consider "importation" to be approximately 20 or more religious texts or items.

The law gives authorities broad power to ban books that run counter to the constitution, "the Muslim religion and other religions, national sovereignty and unity, the national identity and cultural values of society, national security and defense concerns, public order concerns, and the dignity of the human being and individual and collective rights." In accordance with a governmental decree, a commission within the MRA, reviews importation of the Quran. The decree requires all applications to include a full copy of the text and other detailed information about the applicant and text. The ministry has three to six months to review the text, with the absence of a response after that time constituting a rejection of the importation application.

A separate decree covering religious texts other than the Quran states, "The content of religious books for import, regardless of format, must not undermine the religious unity of society, the national religious reference, public order, good morals, fundamental rights and liberties, or the law." The importer must submit the text and other information, and the ministry must respond within 30 days. A nonresponse after this period is considered a rejection. Religious texts distributed without authorization may be seized and destroyed.

The law states the government must approve any modification of structures intended for non-Islamic collective worship.

The family code prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men unless the man converts to Islam, although authorities do not always enforce this provision. The code also prohibits Muslim men from marrying non-Muslim women. Under the law, children born to a Muslim father are considered Muslim regardless of the mother's religion. In the event of a divorce, a civil court determines the custody of any children.

The law requires couples to present a government-issued marriage license before imams may conduct religious marriage ceremonies.

The Ministries of National Education and Religious Affairs require, regulate, and fund the study of Islam in public schools. Religious education focuses on Islamic studies but includes information on Christianity and Judaism and is mandatory at the primary and secondary school levels. The Ministry of National Education requires private schools to adhere to curricula in line with national standards, particularly regarding the teaching of Islam, or risk closure.

The constitution states discrimination based on religion is prohibited and guarantees state protection for non-Muslims and for the “toleration and respect of different religions.”

The law prohibits all forms of expression that propagate, encourage, or justify discrimination. The government passed a separate hate speech law in 2020, but religious belief or affiliation are not among the categories covered by the law.

The CNDH is responsible for monitoring and evaluating human rights issues, including matters related to religious freedom. The president of the CNDH is appointed by the president of the republic, and its members include civil society representatives and academics. The law authorizes the CNDH to conduct investigations of alleged abuses, issue opinions and recommendations, conduct awareness campaigns, and work with other government authorities to address human rights issues. The CNDH may address religious concerns with appropriate government offices on behalf of individuals or groups it believes are not being treated fairly. The CNDH does not have the authority to enforce its decisions but may refer matters to the relevant administrative or criminal court. It submits an annual report to the president.

By law, individuals who convert from Islam to another religion are ineligible to receive an inheritance in the absence of a will.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## **GOVERNMENT PRACTICES**

### **Abuses Involving Violence, Detention, or Mass Resettlement**

On November 6, the Court of Tizi Ouzou sentenced five members of the Tizi Ghenif church to three years in prison and fined 200,000 dinars (\$1,500) for unauthorized worship and accusations of producing religious materials for distribution. On October 23, the court sentenced Pastor Allahoum of the Ouacif church to a two-month suspended prison

sentence and a fine for opening a place of worship without authorization. All the defendants remained free pending appeal of the verdict.

### Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

On July 4, the Algiers Court of Appeals upheld the three-year prison sentence and fine of 100,000 dinars (\$750) imposed in 2021 on Christian convert Slimane Bouhafs for a range of offenses, including blasphemy and terrorism-related crimes. The court alleged he was a member of the Self-Determination of Kabylie (also commonly known as MAK), which the government designated a terrorist organization in 2021. Several human rights organizations reported Bouhafs had been forcibly repatriated in 2021 from Tunisia where the United Nations High Commission for Refugees granted him refugee status. At year's end, Bouhafs remained in prison with an anticipated release in September 2024.

At the end of the year, Ahmadi Muslim community leaders said 33 Ahmadi Muslims were defendants in cases in the court system, the same as in 2022. They faced charges ranging from blasphemy to illegal fundraising. According to Ahmadi Muslim leaders, many cases predating 2018 were dismissed after authorities failed to pursue them. Ahmadi Muslim community leaders stated that some judges were tolerant towards Ahmadi Muslims.

On July 5 the government released Christian convert Hamid Soudad pursuant to a presidential pardon. In 2018, Soudad was convicted of "denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam" and was sentenced to a five-year prison sentence for reposting a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad on his Facebook account.

In mid-September, EPA pastor Youssef Ourahmane learned that in July, a court in Tizi Ouzou had convicted and sentenced him in absentia to two years in prison and a 100,000 dinar fine (\$750) for holding an unauthorized religious assembly and worshipping in an unauthorized building. Pastor Ourahmane stated that he had not been informed of the trial and has appealed the verdict. During a November 19 appellate hearing, his sentence was reduced to one year. The conviction stemmed from a March gathering of several Christian families at Pastor Ourahmane's family compound during a school holiday. The compound included a small church, which the wali of the province of Tizi Ouzou sealed in 2019. Pastor Ourahmane remained free pending a further appeal.

On February 1, the Supreme Court overturned on appeal the conviction of Said Djabelkhir for blasphemy. Djabelkhir, an Islamic scholar specializing in Sufism and founder of the "Circle of Enlightenment for Free Thought," an association for thinkers and academics who advocate a progressive Islam, was convicted of blasphemy in 2021 for "offending the precepts of Islam" after a fellow academic filed a complaint about Djabelkhir's writings

on various Islamic rituals. As a result of his conviction, authorities sentenced Djalbelkhir in 2021 to three years in prison, in addition to a fine.

### **Abuses Involving the Ability of Individuals to Engage in Religious Activities Alone or In Community with Others**

The Catholic Church successfully reregistered in 2012 to comply with the Association Law passed that year. The EPA, Ahmadi Muslim community, and several other religious groups reported submitting applications for their organizations to be registered. The government met several times with the EPA in 2023, and said they provided written feedback on their application, but did not approve the application.

The Ahmadi Muslim community remained unregistered, and the government denied receiving completed applications from the group. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Ahmadi Muslim community leaders, the community submitted applications for registration to the government in 2012, 2016, 2020, and most recently in 2022. In May 2022, two senior members of the Ahmadi community visited the MRA to submit the most recent registration application and said guards at the gate would not let them enter. In October, the MOI stated it had never received a registration application from the Ahmadi Muslim community, but the government said previously that it refused to accept applications from the community to register as a Muslim religious association because it did not consider the Ahmadi Muslim community to be Muslim. In 2019, authorities said they would approve the community's registration as non-Muslims, but the Ahmadis said they would not accept registration on that basis.

On September 13, MOI requested the EPA hold a second general assembly to rectify administrative issues MOI had identified with the EPA's application to register as a religious association. The EPA had first submitted its application to MOI in December 2022 and subsequently met with the ministry in March to discuss the submission. Following their March meeting, the EPA held a general assembly, as instructed by MOI, and submitted revised paperwork. The government provided written feedback to that submission during the September meeting, and the EPA provided a revised application on December 21, which was pending a response from the government at year's end.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church said they still had not received responses from the MOI to their prior applications to register as religious associations.

Some religious groups said they assumed they had the right to function as registered 60 days after having submitted their application, even though they had not received an MOI confirmation. Such groups said, however, that service providers, such as utilities and banks, refused to provide

services without proof of registration. As a result, the groups faced the same administrative obstacles as unregistered associations. They also had limited standing to pursue legal complaints and could not engage in charitable activities, which required having a bank account.

In October, Catholic Church officials stated they were able to conduct religious services without interference from the authorities. Catholic officials in other provinces also said they were allowed to worship freely, and authorities facilitated visits by church officials to minister to Christian prisoners.

Some Protestants said they continued to use homes or businesses as “house churches” due to government delays in issuing the necessary legal authorizations. The EPA said it had good relationships with some local authorities, who allowed the group to practice its faith in unregistered spaces.

Representatives of the Jewish community indicated the community had few day-to-day problems with authorities. Although the representatives said the community was not officially registered as a religious association, authorities allowed prayer gatherings with other members of the community in their homes.

Anglican Church representatives confirmed that government officials welcomed the church and allowed its members to worship, despite a lack of official registration as a religious association under the law.

According to the MRA, the government continued to allow government employees to wear religious attire, including the hijab, crosses, and the niqab, at work. The armed forces imposed certain restrictions prohibiting long beards for men or wearing head and face coverings for women that authorities stated could complicate the performance of their official duties.

According to religious leaders, authorities continued to arrest, jail, and fine Christians on charges of proselytizing Muslims, which prompted churches to restrict some activities, such as the distribution of religious literature.

Local press reported that on March 30, a court in Bejaia dissolved the NGO “Azday Adelsan n’ Weqqas” (the Cultural Association of Aokas), at the request of the wali. Authorities accused the NGO of engaging in proselytizing for having distributed documents (CDs, printed materials and leaflets) with a Christian religious theme. The NGO appealed the decision in April and remained closed pending an appeal of the verdict.

Non-Islamic religious texts, music, and video media continued to be available on the informal market, and stores and vendors in the capital

sold Bibles in several languages, including Arabic, French, and Tamazight.

In October, EPA leaders reported difficulties importing religious materials, saying customs officials were not releasing texts held at the port. The Biblical Society, which imports religious texts for all Christian denominations, claimed that the government does not explicitly limit the number of imported Bibles but rather slows down the importation process with excessive regulations. The Biblical Society had previously requested assistance from the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship but did not receive a response.

A court in Tizi Ouzou in November sentenced pastor trainee of the UMC, Salem Bouldja, to three years in prison and a fine for “attempting to shake the faith of a Muslim and for illegal possession of proselytizing material.” The government accused Bouldja of recording songs on CD and distributing them with the aim of proselytizing. Bouldja appealed the judgment and remained free pending the appeal.

MRA officials said the government did not regularly prescreen and approve sermons before imams delivered them during Friday prayers. They also stated the government sometimes provided preapproved sermon topics for Friday prayers to address the public’s concerns following major events or to encourage civic participation through activities such as voting in elections. The MRA said it did not punish imams who did not discuss the suggested sermon topics.

According to MRA officials, if a ministry inspector suspected an imam’s sermon was inappropriate, particularly if it supported violent extremism, the inspector had the authority to summon the imam to a “scientific council” composed of Islamic law scholars and other imams who assessed the sermon’s “correctness.” The government could relieve an imam of duty if he was summoned multiple times. The government also monitored activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses, such as recruitment by extremist groups, and prohibited the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours.

During the year, authorities issued direct orders or applied pressure on church leaders to close six EPA-affiliated churches, bringing the total number of closed churches since 2017 to 42. According to EPA leadership, at the end of the year, three EPA churches remained open in the country. On November 10, the State Council cancelled orders previously issued by the walis of the provinces of Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou that closed EPA churches in those provinces. According to EPA leadership, the seven churches affected by the order would have been unsealed but authorities would not allow them to operate as churches until the government approved the EPA’s application for registration as a religious association.

The government stated the closed churches had operated without government authorization, illegally printed evangelical publications, and failed to meet building safety codes. Interior Ministry officials also stated the government allowed many churches to operate despite their lack of official registration. EPA officials said authorities generally allowed them to organize small prayer groups in homes, often using social media, with groups of nine or less. Larger groups, according to the EPA, attracted the attention of authorities, and the homeowners risked having authorities accuse them of operating unregistered “garage churches.”

The UMC continued to own and maintain Methodist properties throughout the country, despite the relatively small Methodist community and the absence of a leading superintendent residing in the country. The government denied the previous superintendent’s residency renewal in 2008, and the UMC is overseen by a superintendent in Tunis whose visa request to visit Algeria has been pending for over a year. Until 2019, the UMC maintained a power of attorney to manage the properties’ legal affairs, although UMC representatives abroad reported that Algerian embassies abroad had delayed the approval process to obtain the power of attorney. The power of attorney expired in early 2023, and as of year’s end, the UMC had not succeeded in establishing a new power of attorney.

Following pressure from authorities, church leaders closed the UMC-affiliated church in Laarba Nath Irathen in the Tizi Ouzou province in January 2023. Local authorities interrogated the church’s pastor several times and he had received a court summons in February 2022 regarding questions concerning the church’s activities, after which the pastor decided to close the church.

### **Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment**

Christian leaders said courts were sometimes biased against non-Muslims in family law cases such as divorce or custody proceedings.

According to religious community leaders, some local administrations did not always verify religions before conducting marriage ceremonies. As such, some couples were able to marry despite the family code prohibition against Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men.

A representative of the small Jewish community said it had relatively good relationships with authorities.

Christian groups continued to say the government did not respond in a timely manner to their requests for visas for foreign religious workers and visiting scholars and speakers, resulting in de facto visa refusals. Catholic leaders said religious workers experienced long and unpredictable wait times for religious workers’ visas but noted an improvement during the year.

Catholic and Protestant groups continued to state these delays hindered religious practice. UMC officials said the lack of visa issuances was a major impediment to maintaining contact with the church's presence in-country. Higher-level intervention with officials responsible for visa issuance by senior MRA and MFA officials at the request of religious groups sometimes resulted in the issuance of long-term visas, according to those groups. UMC leaders said they were pursuing a visit by their Tunis-based superintendent, though it had not yet been approved by year's end. While the Tunis-based superintendent had not traveled to Algeria by year's end, UMC representatives received tourist visas and visited Algeria at the end of September.

On February 27, President Tebboune granted Algerian citizenship to Jean Paul Vesco, the Catholic Archbishop of Algiers, by presidential decree.

In May, during his visit to the province of Constantine, Minister of Religious Affairs Youcef Belmehdi stated that training for imams "is based on moderation and on the history and instruction of elders," emphasizing that the country would not tolerate extremism.

In April, the chief of staff of the National People's Army (ANP), General Said Chanegriha, warned against the return of religious extremism prevalent in the "dark decade" of the 1990s when the country dealt with a prolonged period of terrorist violence, stating that "the country's institutions will not allow it."

### Other Developments Affecting Religious Freedom

Government-owned radio stations continued to broadcast Christmas and Easter services in French and Arabic. The country's state-run religious television and radio channels broadcast messages against religious extremism. After Friday prayers, state broadcasters aired religious programs countering extremism. Some examples included *Au Coeur de Islam* (At the Heart of Islam) on Radio Channel 3 and *Dans le Sens de l'Islam* (Understanding the Meaning of Islam) on national television.

Senior government officials continued to publicly condemn acts of violence committed in the name of Islam and urged all members of society to reject extremist behavior.

The government and public and private companies funded the preservation of some Catholic churches, particularly those of historical importance. Catholic Church leaders stated in March the government had pledged to assist with the renovation of the historic Sacre-Coeur Cathedral in Algiers. According to the MRA, the government also contributed to renovations of the Notre Dame d'Afrique in Algiers and the Saint-Augustin Basilica in Annaba in prior years. The ministry stated it continued to organize an initiative, in partnership with the MOI and local

neighborhoods, to clean up Christian cemeteries as part of an ongoing effort to maintain historical and cultural landmarks.

According to the government, authorities regularly invited accredited religious representatives to attend national holiday ceremonies.

### Section III.

#### Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Christian leaders said they had good relations with Muslims in their communities, and Christian and Muslim leaders hosted each other during the year. The Notre Dame de Santa Cruz in Oran, site of a fort and Catholic chapel, and the Pierre Claverie Center, a Catholic church and community center in Oran, hosted frequent nonreligious community events and reported Muslims often participated alongside Christians. The EPA reported excellent interfaith dialogue within the religious community.

Jewish community members said the Jewish community was sometimes conflated with Israel in the public consciousness, which occasionally led to incidents of antisemitism from the broader population. Local media often used antisemitic tropes in coverage of the Israel-Hamas conflict and referred to Israel as the "Zionist entity." Contacts also reported an increase in antisemitic attitudes in the general population.

Christian leaders said some Christian converts continued to keep a low profile due to concern for their personal safety and the potential for legal, familial, career, and social problems. According to religious leaders, some individuals who openly engaged in any religious practice other than Sunni Islam reported that family, neighbors, or others criticized their religious practice, pressured them to convert back to Islam, and occasionally insinuated they could be in danger because of their choice. Other converts practiced their new religion openly, according to members of the Christian community.

Media reports often discussed judicial proceedings against members of minority Muslim religious communities, such as Ahmadi Muslims and Shia Muslims, without the presumption of innocence, and local media occasionally portrayed these communities as "sects" or "deviations" from Islam. Ahmadi leaders said their faith was often misunderstood by the public, which largely believed the Ahmadi community was non-Muslim.

EPA leaders said that when Christian converts died, in rare instances family members buried them according to Islamic rites, and their churches had no standing to intervene on their behalf. Christian groups reported some villages, for example in the Kabylie region, continued to prohibit Christians from being buried alongside Muslims. In these cases, Christians opted to be buried under Islamic rites so their remains could stay near those of their families.

## Section IV.

### U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

During the year, the U.S. Ambassador, embassy officials, and visiting U.S. government officials met with representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, Justice, and Interior to discuss the difficulties Ahmadi Muslims, and Christian, Jewish, and other minority religious groups faced in registering as associations, importing religious materials, and obtaining visas. In meetings with senior government officials, the Ambassador routinely raised religious freedom concerns, specifically advocating for the registration of minority religious communities, the reopening of shuttered churches, and the release of individuals imprisoned on charges related to the practice of their faith.

On March 27, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith iftar during which participants discussed the country's religious traditions and the problems faced by religious minorities. Participants noted that the iftar was the first known gathering of this kind, bringing religious and thought leaders from the Muslim community together with religious groups that face difficulties in the country, including the EPA, the Ahmadi Muslim community, the Jewish community, and the Catholic Church.

On March 26, the Ambassador met with the rector of the Great Mosque of Algiers, Sheikh Mohamed al-Mamoune al-Kacimi al-Hassani, to discuss interfaith dialogue and religious freedom.

The Ambassador and other embassy officers met during the year with government-affiliated and independent religious leaders and representatives of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, including the Catholic and Anglican Churches, the EPA, the Ahmadi Muslim, Sufi Muslim, and Jewish communities, to discuss interreligious dialogue and tolerance and, in the case of religious minorities, their rights and legal status.

During travel throughout country, the Ambassador routinely visited religious institutions and spoke with minority religious communities about religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador used these engagements to highlight the tradition of religious diversity and respect for freedom of worship in the country.

Embassy officials discussed the practice of religion, its intersection with politics, religious tolerance, and the religious roles of women with religious and political leaders. The embassy used special events, social media, and speakers' programs to emphasize a message of religious tolerance and respect. Specifically, the embassy used its cultural engagements to emphasize tolerance and its social media engagements to promote the benefits of diversity and inclusion through messages from the Ambassador marking religious holidays.

On December 29, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, the Secretary of State placed Algeria on the Special Watch List for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom.

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