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ALGERIA

USCIRF-RECOMMENDED FOR SPECIAL WATCH LIST

KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, religious freedom conditions in Algeria remained poor. The government continued its ongoing and systematic prosecution of Christians and Muslim minority communities by invoking Article 144 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes blasphemy, and Ordinance 06-03, which criminalizes proselytization and targets anyone who “incites, constrains or utilizes means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim.”

Authorities continued to forcibly close to worshipers nearly all Evangelical Protestant Association (EPA) churches, with only one remaining open—in a limited capacity—in Algiers. The government ordered those churches closed through courts or provincial governors, and it continued to deny legal status to EPA churches and prevent them from reregistering.

Although Ordinance 06-03 recognizes Christianity and provides a framework for the exercise of freedom of religion, it also presents the “Conditions and Rules of Practice of non-Muslim Religious Rituals.” These conditions require state permission to establish a non-Muslim place of worship and conduct worship there, and they penalize “shaking the faith” of a Muslim through producing, storing, or distributing religious material. Catholics in Algeria are also limited in how they can publicly practice their faith, and foreign nationals who attempt to proselytize outside of the church or home are subject to prosecution and deportation.

In May, a court of appeals upheld the in absentia 2023 conviction of Pastor Yousef Ourahmane, vice president of the EPA, but suspended his sentence. A court of first instance had charged him for “establishing a place of worship without permission” and “organizing a religious assembly in an unauthorized place,”

sentencing him to two years in prison and a fine. The court of appeals added six more months’ imprisonment and another fine but suspended his sentence; he continued to await a decision from the Supreme Court on his appeal at the end of the reporting period.

The government reportedly continued its ongoing and systematic persecution of members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, which numbered around 230 as of the most recent data available from 2023—down significantly from an estimated 2,000 members in 2018. The government has reportedly refused registration of the community as an association, claiming that Ahmadiis “denigrate Islam and threaten national security.” Ahmadiis must worship privately for fear of harassment by both the state and other Muslim citizens.

The government also continued to target members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light (AROPL) and surveil them through online monitoring and the deployment of plainclothes police. In the past, the government has called the AROPL a “misguided group” of heretics “out of the Islamic faith” who “should be condemned and punished according to the law.”

While there were reportedly once 140,000 Jews in Algeria, fewer than 200 live there today. The remaining Jewish community has reported few problems with authorities, although antisemitism remains an abiding religious freedom concern in the country. The government has historically tolerated antisemitic hate speech that deliberately conflates Israel, Zionism, and Jews. Such attitudes persist in Algerian public discourse in ways that restrict Jews’ ability to openly practice their religion.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Maintain Algeria on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Coordinate multilaterally with like-minded governments, including members of the Article 18 Alliance, and United Nations (UN) Special Procedures to raise consistent religious freedom concerns with the Algerian government; and
 - Link foreign assistance to the Algerian government to substantive progress toward addressing violations of religious freedom, such as decriminalizing blasphemy and proselytization, approving registration of the EPA and the Ahmadiyya community as religious organizations, and reopening closed places of worship.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Emphasize to the U.S. Department of State and relevant Algerian counterparts the harmful impact of blasphemy laws and the closure of houses of worship on religious freedom and call for greater visibility of religious freedom concerns in U.S.-Algeria bilateral engagements.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Country Update:** [Religious Freedom Conditions in Algeria](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and [Appendix 2](#)**

Background

Approximately 99 percent of Algeria's nearly [47 million people](#) are Sunni Muslims following the Maliki school of Islamic thought. Algeria's constitution establishes Islam as the official state religion. The remaining one percent of the population consists of Ahmadiyya Muslims, Christians, Jews, Shi'a Muslims, and an Ibadi Muslim community.

While Algeria's constitution grants the right to freedom of religion or belief, the government limits the free expression and practice of religion by enforcing laws that favor a particular interpretation of Islam and restrict other religious activities. Algeria's penal and information codes criminalize proselytization and blasphemy. Article 11 of Ordinance 06-03 criminalizes proselytization, targeting anyone who "incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim." The ordinance adds that anyone who "makes, stores, or distributes printed documents or audiovisual footage or by any other medium or means which aim to shake the faith of a Muslim" is subject to penalties, specifically a one- to three-year prison sentence and a fine. Articles 5, 7, and 13 criminalize the "use of an unregistered place of worship," "not worshipping in publicly accessible and identifiable structures," and "modifying a structure for a use not originally intended," respectively.

In April, Parliament proposed penal code revisions, which would introduce penalties for the ambiguously defined crime of "treason" and further restrict an individual's ability to freely speak or share information related to their religious beliefs. Article 144 bis 2 of the Algerian Penal Code criminalizes blasphemy, prescribing prison time and/or a fine for anyone who "insults [the] Prophet . . . or the rest of the prophets, or ridicules the basics of the religion or any of the Islamic rituals."

Restrictions on Religious Minorities

The Algerian government's repression of religious freedom impacts all non-Sunni Muslims in the country, including Ahmadiyya Muslims and others; however, its actions and policies in 2024 particularly targeted the Evangelical Protestant Christian community. Algerian courts upheld several 2023 convictions of EPA pastors during the year, and in January, the government informed a pastor in the region of Kabylia that a court had sentenced him to six months in prison with a fine in absentia for "holding worship without permission." In May, that pastor received a suspended sentence after he filed an appeal. In February, a Tizi Ouzou Province appeals court upheld a court of first instance's

convictions and sentences of five church officials. Each received suspended sentences of varying lengths and penalties, charged with "staging worship without permission" and "worshipping in an unauthorized place." An appeals court also upheld the sentences of three separate EPA congregation members in Tizi Ouzou Province—varying from one month to one year in prison with fines—whom a court of first instance had convicted the prior year for "conducting worship without prior permission." An appeals court also upheld the 2023 sentences of four church leaders from Tizi Ouzou Province charged with "worship in an unauthorized building," "inciting Muslims to change religion," "proselytizing with audio-visual material," "proselytizing by agitating the Muslim faith," and "fundraising without authorization."

Ongoing government toleration of anti-Christian sentiment often forces Christians to meet secretly to worship in Amazigh areas of the country, including Kabylia on the Mediterranean coast. Elders in small towns and villages actively criticized the presence of any churches or visible Christian symbols, discriminating against Christian communities. In September, authorities released Amazigh Christian [Suleiman Bouhafis](#), chair of the St. Augustine Coordination of Christians, after he served a three-year sentence on charges of blasphemy. Algerian security agents abducted and refouled Bouhafis from Tunisia back to Algeria in 2021, and a court convicted him in 2022. An appeals court upheld that verdict the following year, adding additional charges including "hate speech and discrimination," "use of technology to spread false information," and "conspiracy."

Key U.S. Policy

The U.S.-Algeria bilateral relationship continued to deepen in 2024 through a focus on security, tourism, agriculture, education, and technology-sharing. U.S. security assistance supports counterterrorism efforts to [limit](#) the spread of violent extremism activity. Although the United States has engaged in limited public comment on religious freedom concerns in Algeria, then U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain met with Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf in September. During the meeting, Ambassador Hussain urged the Algerian government to approve the registration of Protestant churches and reopen those that have been closed.

On December 29, 2023, the State Department last [maintained](#) Algeria on its Special Watch List under IRFA for severe violations of religious freedom.