

## **Table of Contents**

- ***Two years in prison for not fasting***
  - ***Two Christians acquitted in Algeria Ramadan case***
  - ***Algerian Christians acquitted of eating during Ramadan***
  - ***Algerian Church continues in spite of burnt building***
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### **Two years in prison for not fasting**

AFP (21.10.2010) - HRWF (25.10.2010) - [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net) - A young Algerian was sentenced to two years in prison and a 100,000 dinars (1,000 euros) fine for not fasting during Ramadan in late August, reported the independent daily El Watan today. According to the newspaper, that did not specify the religion of the defendant, Bouchout Fares, 27, was brought before the justice of Oum El Bouaghi, some 500 km southeast of Algiers, and was sentenced Monday for "violating a tenet of Islam".

Acting on information they received, police in a town near Ain el Beida raided an abandoned area in the city center in search of a group of non-fasters. All the persons escaped except Fares who was then placed in custody, reported the paper. For the same grievance, the newspaper reports, the judgment differs from one court to another.

Two non-Christian fasters had been released on October 5 in Ain el Hammam in eastern Algeria, even though the prosecutor had requested three years in prison. A judge of that court in Kabylia dismissed the case because "no article (law) provides for prosecution" in the case of not respecting fasting during Ramadan. Another trial is scheduled for Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> in the Akbou region of little Kabylia, against nine Muslim non-fasters. Islam is the state religion in Algeria.

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### **Two Christians acquitted in Algeria Ramadan case**

AP (05.10.2010) / HRWF (13.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Judicial officials say an Algerian court has acquitted two recent converts to Christianity on trial for offending Islam by eating lunch during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The officials said the court in Ain El Hammam in the eastern Kabylie region on Tuesday threw out the case against Hocine and Salem Fallek. A state prosecutor had sought a three-year prison sentence.

Police caught the couple - both construction workers - off-guard and arrested them while they were having lunch on Aug. 12.

During Ramadan, devout Muslims abstain from food and drink between dawn and sunset, and Algerian law considers it an "offense to the principles of Islam" to eat during the day. Two similar court cases are pending.

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# **Algerian Christians acquitted of eating during Ramadan**

*Judge throws out case against men arrested during Islamic fasting period.*

By Damaris Kremida

Compass Direct (05.10.2010) / HRWF (05.10.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - An Algerian court today acquitted two Christian men of eating during Ramadan in spite of a prosecutor's demand that they be punished for "insulting Islam."

Authorities on Aug. 12 arrested Salem Fellak and Hocine Hocini for eating lunch on a private construction site where they were working. Ramadan, Islam's month of fasting during daylight hours, started this year on Aug. 11.

The incident took place in Ain El-Hammam, a town in the province of Tizi Ouzou about 150 kilometers (93 miles) east of the Algerian capital. Tizi Ouzou is part of Kabylie, an area of Algeria where the country's Protestant church has grown with relative freedom in recent years.

Officers at a nearby police station saw the two men eating and confronted them for not fasting. When police realized the two men were Christians, they accused them of insulting Islam, according to local French-language press reports.

"I do not apologize for anything, and I regret nothing," Fellak said before the verdict, according to Dernieres Nouvelles d'Algerie. "I have the right to not fast. I am a Christian, and until found guilty, the Algerian constitution guarantees respect for individual freedoms."

The Algerian Constitution gives the right to all citizens to practice their faith, although it declares Islam the state religion and prohibits institutions from behavior incompatible with Islamic morality. Proposing other faiths to Muslims is also forbidden.

After police arrested Hocini and Fellak, authorities interrogated them for two hours and "admonished" them, according to a French-language news site. Authorities took them to court, where a state prosecutor questioned them. When the men explained to her that they were Christians, she said that Algeria was a Muslim country with no room for Christians and that they should leave the country, according to a local news site.

Today the judge at the court in Ain El Hamman, however, dismissed the case since "no article [of law] provided for a legal pursuit" against the two Christians, according to the BBC.

A small group of Christians standing on the steps of the courthouse reportedly shouted "Hallelujah!" when they heard the outcome of the case. After the verdict, Fellak said he was happy and that he had done nothing wrong, according to Reuters.

Local media also reported cases of Muslim Algerians arrested for eating during Ramadan.

## **Worshipping without permit**

The charges against the two Christians and a case of four Christians on trial for worshipping without a permit in Tizi Ouzou Province have some wondering what has caused authorities to turn their attention to this small community.

This Sunday (Oct. 10), the four men will appear in court for holding Christian meetings at a residence without permission. One of the men, Mahmoud Yahou, has told a local

newspaper, "This story concerns all Christians in our country. We are a community intimidated around the country."

Yahou cited other recent cases of persecution, including that of Habiba Kouider, who in 2008 was tried for practicing Christianity "without a license." Her case is still pending. Another Christian, Rachid Muhammad Essaghir, has three court cases against him, all in appeals process since 2008.

In most cases, Christians have been charged under a presidential decree from February 2006 that restricts religious worship to government approved buildings. The decree, known as Ordinance 06-03, also outlaws any attempt to convert Muslims to another faith.

"This law of 2006 is contradictory to the constitution," said a regional researcher who requested anonymity. "It creates a gray zone in which the government and police have room to act against the church. This law gives permission to the government to condemn believers for their faith or illegal worship even if the constitution guarantees religious freedom."

Also in Tizi Ouzou city, church leaders who were expanding their building to fit their growing congregation received a letter in August from the governor of the province ordering them to stop all construction and demolish the extension.

Algerian Christians and observers say that the two court cases, along with the order to the Tizi Ouzou church to cease expansion of their building, are unusual because they happened in such a short span of time and because the region is regarded as more tolerant of Christianity.

"Perhaps a new wave of persecution is coming," said the regional researcher. "It's difficult to know, but in a few weeks we encountered a few problems."

An Algerian church leader told Compass the government is finding more subtle ways to pressure Christians.

"I think they don't want to do anything openly," said the leader, who requested anonymity. "So they are using opportunities they can find, like not giving authorization to build the church in Tizi Ouzou, [and the men] not fasting during Ramadan."

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## **Algerian Church continues in spite of burnt building**

### ***Fellowship in Tizi Ouzou received no police protection despite repeated violence***

By Damaris Kremida

Compass Direct (21.01.2010) / HRWF (25.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Members of a church in Algeria's Kabylie region gathered to worship last Saturday (Jan. 16) in their new building despite a protest, vandalism and a fire that damaged the building the previous weekend.

Local Muslims bent on running the congregation out of the neighborhood set fires inside and outside the building on Jan. 9.

Before setting it on fire, the assailants ransacked the Tafat Church building in Tizi Ouzou, a city 100 kilometers (62 miles) east of Algiers. The perpetrators damaged everything within the new building, including electrical appliances.

"This last Saturday the church held a service even though not everyone was present," said Mustapha Krim, president of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA). "But they continue."

The protests against the new church building were unique in the Kabylie region, where the majority of Algeria's Christians live.

"We are outraged," Krim told Algerian daily El Watan. "We believe that the degree of intolerance reached its climax. In Kabylie, this sort of practice is unusual."

The pastor of the church, Mustapha Krireche, said that the fellowship of 300 members had constructed the church building in the neighborhood in order to accommodate their growing needs. They started meeting there in early November of last year.

A short time after the first services, they received a notice from police to stop activities, as local residents had objected to their presence in their neighborhood. The pastor said he refused to sign the notice that police handed to him. Some young people threw rocks at the new building, he said.

Troubles for Tafat ramped up on Dec. 26, when its members gathered for their Saturday morning service. More than 20 local Muslims blocked the entrance to the building, keeping church members from entering. Two days later, some of the protestors broke into the new building and stole the church microphones and speakers.

The following Saturday (Jan. 2), a group of protestors entered the building and stopped the service. That day church leaders had instructed children and women to stay home for their safety, according to Krireche. After protestors became violent and threatened the pastor, church members present decided to close the building so as to avoid more problems.

In the most recent incident, on Jan. 9 protestors entered the building and started to vandalize it, leaving after police arrived. But they returned in the evening to burn anything that they could, including furniture, appliances, Bibles, hymnbooks and a cross. Nothing inside the building was left standing.

Reuters reported that the attack in Tizi Ouzou came days after a spate of attacks on Christians in Malaysia and Egypt, "though there was no evidence of a direct link."

"The devastation of our church in Tizi Ouzou, which coincides with events in Egypt where they burned churches, leads us to ask questions about the international Islamists," Krim told El Watan last week. "Is this an example continuing here in Tizi Ouzou? The Islam of our parents is nothing compared to today's political Islam. To the indifference of the authorities, it manipulates people against Christians."

Christian leaders have said authorities have not taken appropriate steps to protect the church or bring justice to their claims. The church has filed half a dozen complaints with police on attacks against them in the last two months. Krim told The Associated Press last week that authorities don't want to intervene out of fear of Islamist retaliation.

The EPA president told Compass that church leaders met with local authorities this week to file a complaint against a Muslim and his hard-line group said to be responsible for the attacks against Tafat.

As of this week, local officials had not responded to Tafat's request for protection.

In February 2008 the government applied measures to better control non-Muslim groups through Ordinance 06-03. Authorities ordered the closure of 26 churches in the Kabylie region, both buildings and house churches, maintaining that they were not registered under the ordinance.

Despite efforts to comply with the ordinance, many Christian groups indicated they were blocked by lack of information, bureaucratic processes or resistance to their applications, according to the 2009 International Religious Freedom Report by the U.S. Department of State. None of the churches have closed since then, but their status continues to remain questionable and only valid through registration with the EPA.

According to a government decree dating back to June 2007, local officials can prohibit non-Muslim activities if they constitute a danger to the public order or if religious adherents move from their originally planned location, El Watan reported.

Some Protestants have estimated the number of Algeria's Christians at as many as 65,000, though the U.S. State Department cites unofficial estimates of Christians and Jews combined as ranging from 12,000 to 40,000.

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