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Algerian church attacked again

Pastor tells of repeated attempts to attack his church

WWRN (26.11.2013) - The pastor of a church in southern Algeria has reported the details of a fresh attack on his church – the third of its kind – which he says proves that some Algerians are against the presence of churches in their country.

The pastor, who wishes to remain nameless, said his church was attacked on November 12 at around 11pm by a group which attempted to set fire to the church.

"A group of people tried to get inside the church," he said. "From the outside the attackers set fire to a tyre and they tried to throw the tyre inside the building. But as this did not work (because the fence and barbed wire proved to be too high) they tried to enter through the church gate. Then they tried to smash the gate to enter the building."

The attackers dispersed after the arrival of police, but none were arrested, although the pastor said he would register a complaint with the police. He added that he believed the attack was a sign that the group were against the existence of a church in the city.

"There are people who try to intimidate us to push us out of here. I think it is the growth of our community that disturbs them," he said.

In 2010, a group succeeded in breaking through the gates and entering into the church. They then attempted to steal the crucifix from the roof of the church.

Then, in November 2012, the pastor received death threats following the release of the controversial film, *Innocence of Muslims*, considered by many to be anti-Islam. The threats also detailed plans to burn down the church.

This time, the attack against the church coincided with the celebration of the Muslim festival of Ashura. To help protect against these attacks and to identify the perpetrators, the EPA (Protestant Church of Algeria) plans to install surveillance cameras around the church.

Hundreds controversially break Ramadan fast in northern Algeria

Wwm (06.08.2013) - Around 200 people ate together at a public lunch in the town of Tizi Ouzou on Saturday (Aug 3) to protest against the "persecution of non-fasters and creeping Islamisation" in the Kabylie region in northern Algeria.

Sandwiches and soft drinks were shared during a picnic held just a short stroll from the headquarters of the local law enforcement agencies, which looked on but did not act.

In Algeria, where Islam is the state religion, breaking the Ramadan fast in public is punishable by fine and imprisonment.

Picnickers circulated a petition, which translates: "The values of tolerance and peaceful co-existence of people of all opinions and faiths that has existed in Kabylie since the dawn of time is being trampled upon. The Algerian government is intruding into private life and persecuting non-fasters.

"We call on the citizens of the world who identify with the values of tolerance and respect to support the initiative of Kabylie by signing the petition for the right to freedom of conscience and tolerance and to guard against any suppression."

Protesters told World Watch Monitor the picnic was organised as a response to the alleged intimidation of non-fasters on July 19 by police in Tizrit, 35 km north of Tizi Ouzou.

"We were sitting quietly in a cafeteria, which opens during the day throughout the month of Ramadan," said one protester, named Malik. "The police came and started taking down the names of people who were in a cafeteria during Ramadan. We don't understand. We should be free to fast or not to fast."

Malik said the police asked the café's owner to report to the police station and confiscated some of his legal documents.

Another picnic was held simultaneously in the town of Aokas in the neighbouring Béjaïa province, which attracted over 100 people.

Reaction

A number of local Islamic associations expressed their indignation and called on the state to punish those involved.

Meanwhile, the Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs Abu Abdellah Ghoulamallah said the picnics were "provocative and ridiculous".

"[The protesters] do not represent the Kabylia region, [or] Tizi Ouzou's residents," he told Echorouk newspaper. "A total of 800 mosques are built in this province and 1.3 million Muslims are living there. So, 200 people do not represent the region and their act is ridiculous as they want to offend Muslims, but they humiliated themselves instead."

The state news agency APS reported that the protestors were "not attacking Islam" but asking for "freedom of worship and conscience [which is] guaranteed by the Algerian law".

However, APS's claim that the non-fasters included "followers of the evangelistic church who drank beer" was contested and considered by some an attempt to discredit the protestors.

One picnicker, who wished to remain nameless, told World Watch Monitor: "From the first moment to the last, I did not once witness the presence of any evangelist who drinks beer."

Another [told the BBC](#): "We're saying to others that this is Kabylie, and here we do what we want. We have to respect our culture, our traditions, our individual and religious freedoms. It doesn't matter if they're Jewish, Christian or Muslim."

In 2010, two Algerian Christians were taken to court for publicly breaking the fast, although they were [later acquitted](#).

Algeria's Protestants want their churches back

Christian minority wants return of churches used for decades by other entities

World Watch Monitor (27.06.2013) - The Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) has reaffirmed its desire to regain control of several former churches used today for other purposes.

Christians are the distinct minority in Algeria, representing less than 1% of Algeria's 38 million inhabitants, and often face restrictions when seeking to build new churches.

The presence of Protestant Christians in Algeria dates back to the French colonial era, when a number of churches were built.

However, after the country gained independence in 1962, many of these buildings were given to other purposes.

One example is the temple of Mostaganem in the north-west of the country, which became a clinic in 1976.

In January 2012, the clinic moved locations and the EPA sent one of its members to guard the premise in the hope of restoring the building to its former use.

However, local authorities ordered the closure of the premises and the expulsion of EPA members, instead allowing a charity to move into the building.

The EPA [filed a complaint](#) against both the local authorities and the charity.

"Instead of returning the temple, located in the city centre, to the EPA, local authorities have just given it to a charity," Pastor Mustapha Krim, EPA President, told World Watch Monitor.

"The occupants broke in and changed the locks," he said.

The situation of Mostaganem is not an isolated case. In the north-eastern city of Béjaïa, a temple (pictured left) once belonging to the Evangelical Reformed Church (now the EPA), was given by local authorities to the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) after the church's pastor fell seriously ill and returned to France.

Now, Protestants in cities like Béjaïa and Mostaganem are petitioning for their old churches to be returned.

"I started to take the first steps in 2003," explained Krim. "I turned first to the Governor, who never replied. I wrote at least eight letters requesting hearings to previous Governors. Once, one Deputy Governor received me, he filled a small file, and since then

no news. In addition, we sent a letter to the Ministry of the Interior and even to the Presidency, but nothing has ever transpired.

"This temple [in Béjaïa] belongs lawfully to the Protestant Church of Algeria. At our request, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has commissioned a survey to determine who owns the premises. Finally, the investigation concluded that this property belongs to the Reformed Church, which later became the Protestant Church in Algeria."

After completing in vain all the administrative procedures necessary for the recovery of the temple, the EPA brought the case to court, but there have been no tangible results.

"The judge is not doing his job," said Krim. "Each time, he argues that a document was missing in our dossier, whereas our lawyer had provided the necessary document for a complete dossier."

The case is currently with the Council of State (a high-court responsible for settling disputes between legislative bodies and Algerian citizens) and the next development may take time, EPA's lawyer told Word Watch Monitor.

For now, the two Protestant communities in Béjaïa continue to hold their meetings in the cramped confines of an administrative block of buildings, which hosts corporate and medical offices.

Background

Article 36 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, while freedom of worship is guaranteed by Article 2 of Ordinance No. 06-03.

But since the promulgation on March 20, 2006 of a law regulating non-Muslim worship, there have been a number of attacks and acts of intimidation against Christians.

In May 2011, the Governor of the north-east province of Béjaïa invoked the 2006 law to order the closure of seven protestant churches accused of operating "illegally".

In January 2011, the Tafat church in the northern Kabylia area was reportedly ransacked and set on fire by radical Islamists.

Many Christians have been charged under the 2006 Act for "actions tending towards converting a Muslim to another religion".

Sentences range between two and five years' imprisonment and a fine of between 500,000 and one million dinars (5,000 to 10,000 Euros).

Several cases remain unresolved, including that of [Mohamed Ibouène](#), who was sentenced on February 14, 2013 to pay a fine of 100,000 dinars for proselytizing. He has appealed the ruling, but the date of a new trial is not yet known.

In 2008, Christian teacher [Habiba Kouider](#) was charged under the 2006 law for illegal possession of bibles. Her trial drew widespread media attention and contempt from the European Parliament and human-rights watchdogs such as Amnesty International. The case is on-going.

Algeria is ranked No. 29 in the 2013 [World Watch List](#) of the 50 countries where Christians are most under pressure for their faith. The creator of the list, Open Doors

International, claims pressure on Christians in Algeria is increasing, due primarily to the Islamization of the region in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Algeria upholds conviction of Christian convert from Islam; prison sentence rescinded, fine increased

The Christian Post (14.02.2013) - An Algerian judge under pressure from Islamists to uphold a Christian's conviction for alleged proselytizing rescinded his one-year prison term on Wednesday but doubled his fine, an attorney said.

Mohamed Ibaouene, 36, was shocked to learn on Dec. 11 that he had been convicted in absentia on July 4, 2012 by a court in Tigzirt, sentenced to one year in prison and fined 50,000 dinars (US \$635) on a charge of pressuring a Muslim to convert. His attorney, Mohamed Benbelkacem, told Morning Star News that the appeals judge in Tindouf, in raising Ibaouene's fine to 100,000 dinars, must have realized there was no basis for the charge but was under pressure from Islamists to impose a sentence.

"The judge must have undergone some pressure to arrive at this sentence – that is the only explanation," Benbelkacem said. "That is why he had to choose to split off one of the two punishments; he could not decide for the punishment sought by the prosecutor, namely two years in prison followed by a 100,000-dinar fine, because it was unfair and unfounded. Unfortunately, we are faced with an act of injustice, and we intend to appeal."

Ibaouene was convicted of "inciting a Muslim with pressure to change his religion" under Algeria's controversial Law 06/03, which places restrictions on the religious practice of non-Muslims. The decision on the appeal of his sentence was to be announced on Feb. 6, but the judge delayed the verdict until today without explanation.

Ibaouene denies the charge, saying the a machine operator at the company where he worked as a manager, identified only as Abdelkrim M., was the one pressuring him to change his religion. The 27-year-old machine operator, known to be an Islamic extremist, leveled the accusation only after Ibaouene, a convert from Islam, refused to renounce Christ, Ibaouene says.

Ibaouene's attorney said the case provided a long-sought sentencing of a Christian under Law 03/06, with the case resolved quickly compared with delays in other such cases.

"He could not decide for acquittal because of the pressure, so it must be that the Algerian justice system finally found a scapegoat to finally be able to implement the effects of Law 03/06," Benbelkacem said. "I am not satisfied with the verdict, and I am even disappointed and upset, because in this case there is no evidence to support the accusation against my client."

The judge's verdict was brief: "The accused, Mohamed Ibaouene, is condemned to pay a fine of 100,000 dinars," thereby revoking the one-year prison sentence.

The president of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), Mustapha Krim, told Morning Star News the ruling was an affront to freedom.

"Certainly we will appeal the ruling," Krim said. "Moreover, we will meet soon in the EPA to discuss follow-up to this case. I must say that as long as Law 03/06 exists, there will always be those who will falsely accuse us as Christians."

Ibaouene, who was never summoned by police or other authorities prior to his conviction, said Abdelkrim M. had approached him at his office for the sole purpose of asking him if he was a Christian and trying to persuade him to convert back to Islam.

When Ibaouene refused to renounce Christ, Abdelkrim M. then asked him if he believed in Islam and, in spite of what Ibaouene had already told him, was astonished when the Christian told him he did not believe in it at all, but rather in God and Christ, Ibaouene says.

Abdelkrim M. then filed a complaint with the National Gendarmerie in Tindouf, accusing Ibaouene of pressuring him to renounce Islam, according to a copy of the judgment obtained by Morning Star News.

Authorities did not serve the judgment to Ibaouene sooner presumably because he had left Tindouf after marrying in June 2012 and they were not aware of his whereabouts, and because of slow administrative processes. Ibaouene is part of an undisclosed church in Tizi Ouzou, capital of Tizi Ouzou Province on Algeria's northern central coast.

Law 03/2006, commonly known as Law 06/03, mandates a prison term of two to five years and a fine of 500,000 to 1 million dinars for anyone who "incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion, or using for this purpose the institutions of education, health, social, cultural, or educational institutions, or other establishment, or financial advantage; or (2) makes, stores or distributes printed documents or films or other audiovisual medium or means intended to undermine the faith of a Muslim."

Algeria's population of 35.4 million people is more than 97 percent Muslim and .28 percent Christian, according to Operation World.

The Algerian constitution makes Islam the state religion and requires the president to be Muslim. Algerian law also prohibits non-Muslims from gathering to pray except in areas approved by the state.

One year in prison for "proselytism"

HRWF (07.02.2013) - On 23 January, the Court of Cassation confirmed the sentence to one-year imprisonment and a 500 EUR fine of Ibouène Mohamed, a Christian of Muslim origin, for talking about his faith at his workplace.

Once, Ibouène who was working in a multinational in Tindouf talked about God and his faith to a colleague. The latter lodged a complaint against him for attempting to convert him.

In 2008, Habiba Kouider, a Muslim convert to Christianity, was stopped by the police while she was carrying several Christian books. Kouider's brothers learned about her conversion to Christianity after her case sparked national and international media attention and kicked her out of the family's home. She is still waiting for the final verdict.

Anti-proselytism law

In 2006, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika issued Ordinance 06-03, which regulates non-Muslim religious worship. The ordinance permits non-Muslims to practice religious rights, but such practice must not violate public order, morality, and the rights of others. However, Ordinance 06-03 forbids attempting to proselytize Muslims, or even to shake the faith of a Muslim.' As demonstrated in Section 2 herein, Algerian authorities have used these laws to harass and persecute minority religious groups.

Under Ordinance 06-03, printing, storing, or distributing materials for converting Muslims carries heavy penalties: up to five years in jail and up to one million Algerian dinars. As such, Christians do not carry religious materials with them out of fear. Likewise, proselytism carries heavy punishments: lay persons can receive one to three years in jail and fines up to 500,000 dinars; religious leaders can receive three to five years in prison and may be fined up to one million dinars. Further, conduct that incites, constrains, or seduces with a tendency to convert a Muslim, or using —education, health, social, culture, training . . . or any financial means to convert a Muslim is punishable by five years in jail and fines up to 500,000 dinars.

Although government officials stated that the ordinance does not impose any extraordinary burdens on non-Muslims that are not faced by Muslims as well, no reciprocal legislation banning Muslim proselytism of non-Muslims exists.

Universal Periodic Review of Algeria in 2012 and 2008

In May 2012, Algeria presented its human rights report at the UN Universal Periodic Review. Although the European Center for Law and Justice, Jubilee Campaign and Open Doors sent a submission denouncing the governmental limitations to freedom of religion or belief, including the law forbidding the sharing of one's beliefs, the issue was not raised during the interactive debate and in the recommendations.

In 2008, the Holy See, Belgium and Brazil had criticized Ordinance 06-03 during the interactive debate and Algeria had responded:

s in par. 525 to 526 of the HRC report:

525. Ordinance nr 06-03 of 28 February 2006 fixing the conditions and the regulations concerning the practice of non-Muslim religions led to numerous comments. Article 2 of this text explicitly provides that « The Algerian State guarantees the free exercise of religion in the framework of the respect of the provisions of the Constitution, of this Ordinance, of the laws and regulations in force, of public order and the fundamental freedoms of the other persons. The State also guarantees tolerance and respect between the various religions.» The said provisions concerning non-Muslim religions are only an extension to these religions of those already in force and applicable to the Muslim religion:

- *Ordinance 77-03 of 19 February 1997 concerning religious collections*
- *Executive decree 91-81 of 23 March 1991 concerning mosques*
- *Article 87 bis of Law 01-09 of 26 June 2001.*

526. Ordinance of 28 February 2006 fills in a juridical gap. It was adopted in the aftermath of numerous requests from citizens who noted that under cover of religious freedom an aggressive proselytism was instrumentalizing their current problems sowing confusion and division in the families and the communities. Moreover, these destabilizing activities are carried out by non qualified, non recognized and non authorizes persons. In fact, what is applicable to Islam, the majority religion in Algeria, was extended to the other religions on the basis of the non-discrimination principle. It is an oxymoron to accuse Algeria of intolerance, a country which is proud to be the motherland of Emir

Abdelkader, who saved persecuted Christians. Moreover, Evangelical proselytism which destabilizes interreligious coexistence equally affects today African countries predominantly Christian and Muslim."
