



# OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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## United Nations Human Rights Council

### Universal Periodic Review – Algeria

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The Advocacy Department of Open Doors International submits this analysis of religious freedom in the Republic of Algeria as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of UN member-state Algeria, scheduled for May 2012.

#### Legal situation

Article 2 of the Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria declares Islam to be the religion of the state. According to article 36, Freedom of Creed and Opinion is inviolable.

Islamic Law, as interpreted in the country, does not recognize conversion from Islam to any other religion, however, conversion is not illegal under civil law.

The Law requires religions groups to register their organizations with the Government, prior to conducting any religious activity.

The Catholic Church and, since July 2011, the Protestant Church (Eglise Protestante d'Algérie, EPA), are the only officially recognized non-Muslim religious group in the country. The Anglican, Seventh-Day Adventist, and other Protestant churches have pending registration requests with the Government and report no government interference in holding services.

The government is strictly monitoring the activities of the churches.

Despite the official registration of the EPA in July 2011, the church has not been able to register any of its local churches with the government.

#### Ordinance 06-03

In September 2006, Ordinance 06-03 entered into effect. This ordinance has been enforced since February 2008. The ordinance strictly regulates non-Muslim worship in the country. Articles 5-9 require that all structures designated for non-Muslim religious worship be registered with the state. Churches need prior approval for any modification to existing buildings. Furthermore, the Ordinance stipulates that worship may only take place in structures exclusively intended and approved for that purpose, thereby prohibiting informal Christian services in private homes or in outdoor settings.

The ordinance makes proselytizing a criminal offense, with a punishment from 1-3 years imprisonment and a maximum fine of 500,000 Dinars for lay individuals, and 3-5 years imprisonment and a maximum fine of 1,000,000 Dinars for religious leaders.

In May 2007, the Government issued Executive Decree 07-135, which gave greater precision to Article 8 of the Ordinance, specifying the manner and conditions under which religious services of non-Muslims may take place.

In June 2007, the Government issued Executive Decree 07-158, which gave greater precision to Article 9 of the Ordinance, specifying the composition of the National Commission for non-Muslim Religious Services and the regulations that govern it.

In practice, Ordinance 06-03 and the Penal Code enable the Government to shut down any informal religious service that takes place in private homes or in secluded outdoor settings.



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#### Censorship

The Ministries of Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Commerce, must all approve the importation of non-Islamic religious writings.

Individuals may bring their own personal copy of non-Islamic texts, such as the Bible, into the country.

Christian leaders reported that they have been unable to import Bibles and other printed religious materials since 2005.

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#### Churches ordered to close

In May 2011, the Governor of the Province of Bejaïa order the church closures of all Churches in the Algerian territory. As the governor is not in the position to take decisions concerning the whole country, only churches in Bejaïa Province eventually received a closing order. Meanwhile, the churches have been allowed to reopen, however, this has not been confirmed in writing and the order to close the churches has not been repealed.

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#### Appreciation and recommendations

Open Doors welcomes the official registration of the Protestant Church. Practice will learn whether this registration will enable local protestant churches to register with the local authorities.

Open Doors deplores the fact that several other non-Muslim religious groups are still awaiting registration.

Open Doors further deplores the refusal of the recommendation of Belgium during the first cycle, to repeal Ordinance 06-03 as this ordinance is severely limiting the Freedom of Religion or Belief for all non-Muslims in Algeria. Open Doors would therefore appreciate if Algeria would reconsider its position and review all its legislation to guarantee full freedom of Religion or Belief for all its citizens, as laid down in the various international human rights treaties.