




algeria

PERSECUTION 101

Sixty years after its independence, Algeria continues to oppress Christians and other unfavored religious groups.

Algerian authorities continue to harass and imprison the country's small Christian population. Through arrests, jailtime, and fines, the authorities enforce its blasphemy and anti-proselytization laws, creating an environment of fear and repression in the country. Thirty-six churches were closed across the country between 2017 and 2022, according to the U.S. Department of State, with no path to reopening in sight, and the president of the evangelical church was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2022 for comments on social media considered by the authorities to violate the country's anti-proselytization law.





QUICK FACTS



Type of Government

Presidential
Republic



Chief Executive

Abdelmadjid
Tebboune of the
National Liberation
Front (*since 2019*)



Total Population

44.7 million
(2023 estimate)



Religious Demography

99% Sunni Muslim - 44.3 mil
1% other (Christian, Jewish,
and other sects of Islam) -
approx 400,000



Ethnic Demography

99% Arab-Berber
1% Other

TYPES OF PERSECUTION



Church Closures

The Algerian government uses a variety of excuses to justify closing Christian places of worship, preventing believers from worshipping together or pushing them to informal gatherings.



Legal Repression

Christians, Jews, and followers of non-Sunni sects of Islam are criminalized for acts ranging from sharing their faith to broadcasting religious radio programming.



Social Pressure

Though much of Algerian society accepts the tiny Christian community, some Christians experience serious pressure from their home communities, especially first-generation Christians leaving Islam.



ICC IN ALGERIA

Algeria is not friendly to outside organizations working in the country, much less Christian organizations like ICC that bolster and support the Algerian church. Still, ICC has been able to work fruitfully in Algeria for many years, supporting the church locally through livelihood projects for Christian prisoners and their families and internationally through advocacy around certain prisoner cases and during spates of church closures.

Utilizing a network of contacts both in the country and out, ICC verifies cases of persecution and provides practical aid to those affected. When a pastor or ministry leader is imprisoned, for instance, ICC may help to provide legal assistance for the prisoner and funds to feed the prisoner's family. Where appropriate, ICC works with the U.S. Department of State to pressure the Algerian government on behalf of these prisoners, urging the authorities to drop charges and release those held unjustly.

Political Backgrounder for Religious Freedom Issues in Algeria

The evangelical church in Algeria, represented by the Eglise Protestante d'Algérie (EPA), has worshipped in relative peace for many decades. However, a series of challenges to their legal status in the early 2000s kicked off decades of serious pressure from the government. Eighteen churches in the EPA network were closed between November 2017 and the end of 2019, including several incidents in which the authorities used violence to eject peaceful worshippers from their place of worship.

In 2020, authorities closed all places of worship, including churches, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for the move. Though the first order impact Muslims and Christians alike, churches were excluded when authorities relaxed the closures on February 15, 2021.

After decades of harassment under the authoritarian regime of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, under whose administration the legal challenges to religious freedom in the early 2000s were crafted, the Christian church in Algeria had reason for optimism when Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a self-styled reformer took power in December of 2019.

The international community watched with interest as Tebboune settled into the presidency. The widespread civil unrest and calls for reform that had led to Bouteflika's resignation continued as protestors gathered week after week to demand that the new administration make good on its promises. It was hoped that Tebboune would reopen the closed churches and make practical steps to ensure that religious minorities could practice their faith freely.

Tebboune steadfastly promised "radical changes," pointing to a constitutional reform committee as evidence of his devotion to the cause.

Observers and Algerian religious minorities were disappointed, then, when Tebboune proved unwilling to enact reform. Algeria's blasphemy and anti-proselytization laws remain in place, as does Ordinance 06-03 which governs non-Muslim worship. The long-delayed constitutional reforms did not increase protection for religious freedom and were widely panned by human rights watchdogs.

The EPA has been consistent in its efforts to work with the authorities but has seen few results, with authorities simply refusing to engage with the Christian church. The national commission tasked with regulating non-Muslim worship has never met. "We do not understand the relentless injustice of the Algerian government towards us," a spokesman for the EPA told ICC. "They refuse to hear us or listen to us."

Beginning in 2020 and continuing every year since, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that the Department of State list Algeria on its Special Watchlist of countries which have engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom. In 2021 and 2022 the Department of State accepted USCIRF's recommendation, sending a strong diplomatic message to Algeria that its repression of religious freedom is unacceptable to the international community.

US Government Designations

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2001	None	None
2002	None	None
2003	None	None
2004	None	None
2005	None	None
2006	None	None
2007	None	None
2008	None	None
2009	None	None
2010	None	None
2011	None	None
2012	None	None
2013	None	None
2014	None	None
2015	None	None
2016	None	None

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2017	None	None
2018	None	None
2019	None	None
2020	SWL	None
2021	SWL	SWL
2022	SWL	SWL
2023	SWL	None

Resources and Reports

[ICC's 2022 POY Report - Algeria Chapter](#)

[USCIRF 2023 Annual Report – Algeria Chapter](#)

[State Department 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom – Algeria Chapter](#)

