



5.21.18

## ALGERIA | Christians Unjustly Convicted

CSW's sources confirmed that two Algerian Christians were convicted and fined for proselytizing. During a hearing on May 16, Noureddeine, a 30-year-old Christian man from the city of Tiaret, was found guilty of proselytizing and fined.

Noureddeine's case goes back to 2015, when his car was stopped and searched at a police checkpoint and a number of Bibles in Arabic were found in it. The presiding judge dropped a two-year-sentence he had received earlier in absentia but upheld a three-month suspended sentence. He is not appealing the verdict.

CSW also learned that a Christian from the city of Tizi Ouzou was also convicted of proselytizing last week. Nabil, 28, was stopped and searched in 2016 upon returning from a trip abroad where he had attended a Christian training conference. The police found keyrings and scarves with Christian engravings and embroidery on them in his possession. Although he said they were gifts, he was accused of illegally importing Christian materials, and his case was referred to the general prosecutor. He too had been sentenced to prison in absentia. During the recent court hearing, the presiding judge dropped the prison sentence but ordered him to pay an unspecified customs fine for illegal importation, plus legal expenses.

These sentences come during a fresh wave of repression initiated by the government that has resulted in the closure of many churches in the country. CSW's sources assert that the authorities are implementing the provisions of a much-criticized law enacted in 2006 to regulate the worship of non-Muslims. Not only does the law criminalize proselytizing Muslims, it also places severe restrictions on using premises for the purposes of worship, on the construction of new churches, and on printing or importing Christian books and materials. By doing so, the law contradicts the Algerian constitution, which stipulates the right to freedom of worship for recognized religions in Article 42, and undermines the provisions contained in international covenants to which Algeria is a signatory, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned over the manner in which the 2006 Law suppresses the rights of country's Christian minority. Sadly, concerns expressed at the time of its passing have proven justified. The law has opened the way for Christians to be accused of proselytism and blasphemy, and to be threatened with imprisonment and monetary fines. It has also facilitated the closure of many churches by local authorities. CSW urges the Algerian government to repeal this law, which contravenes constitutional stipulations and international human right standards, to ensure fair treatment and due process for non-Muslims, and to re-open closed churches."