

Police Seal Off Church for Printing Bibles, Tracts

A church in Algeria's northwestern town of Aïn Turk (15 kilometers from Oran city) has been closed down by local authorities.

The church, affiliated to the Protestant Church of Algeria (known as EPA, its French acronym), was sealed off by police on Nov. 9.

Authorities in Oran claimed the church had been used to "illegally print Gospels and publications intended for evangelism."

The police notification also stated that the church didn't have state approval. But the president of the EPA, Rev Mahmoud Haddad, denied any wrongdoing, saying the justifications for closing the church were "unfounded."

"Firstly, this community is indeed affiliated to the Protestant Church of Algeria, which has been officially recognized by the government since 1974 and is accredited with both the Ministry of the Interior and the local government," he said.

"Also there is no printing activity of Gospels or Christian publications inside these premises."

He pointed to several "anomalies and falsehoods" in the notification, which stated that the church of Aïn Turk belonged to a man named "Rachid," who serves there as a pastor.

"This is not the case," said Rev. Haddad, who added that the accusations were "unjust and false."

Youssef, a board member at Aïn Turk church, added: "I am very

saddened by this injustice and persecution we are facing in Algeria. The notification of the Prefect is based on false motives.”

World Watch Monitor has reported extensively about intimidations and harassment faced by churches in Algeria.

In May, the human rights situation in Algeria was debated by the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The session was attended by the president of the EPA, and raised hope among the Christian community, which expected positive changes.

A new Constitution, passed in February 2016, established freedom of religious worship. Article 36 states that freedom of religious worship is guaranteed in compliance with the law. But in practice, a number of churches were ordered to cease all religious activities on the grounds that they were in breach of a 2006 law which regulates non-Muslim worship.

Moreover, EPA international partners planning to visit churches in Algeria have seen their visa application denied.
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