

# ALGERIA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience. It declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits state institutions from behaving in a manner incompatible with Islam. The law grants all individuals the right to practice their religion as long as they respect public order and regulations. Offending the creed of Islam or its prophets is a criminal offense, as is insulting any religion. Proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims also constitutes a crime, although the government has not enforced this provision of the law in several years. The government sentenced a journalist in absentia for “offending the Prophet Muhammad,” and delayed the journalist’s appeal. There continued to be no developments in the cases of two Christians who had been arrested and tried in prior years for religious offenses. The government issued public statements opposing religious extremism and announced the replacement of volunteer imams at 55 mosques in Algiers for “spreading Salafism.” Christians received government permission in November to import Bibles and other devotional materials, after an 18-month wait. Christians reported continuing delays in obtaining visas for foreign religious workers. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb took responsibility for the killing of nine soldiers in Ain Defla Province in July. Senior government officials issued statements opposing calls for violence in the name of Islam made by the group, and similar calls by Jund al-Khalifa, a group allied with Da’esh (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).

Ethno-religious tensions in the Ghardaia region erupted into clashes in July, reportedly resulting in at least 22 deaths. In January across the country hundreds of people demonstrated – mostly peacefully, according to media reports – in support of the Prophet Muhammad following publication of new cartoons depicting the Prophet in the first edition of *Charlie Hebdo* printed after the killing of its staff members by terrorists. The organizers said the demonstrations were to show participants did not support the *Je suis Charlie* global movement or the publication of cartoons of the Prophet, even while condemning the killings. There were reports of family members abusing Muslims who converted or expressed an interest in Christianity. Practitioners of non-Sunni-Muslim religions, including Christians and Jews, reported they had experienced threats and intolerance and often kept a low profile as a result.

The U.S. Ambassador encouraged the government to promote religious tolerance. Embassy officers in meetings and programs with religious leaders from both

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majority and minority religious groups, as well as with members of the public, focused on pluralism and religious moderation. During Ramadan, the embassy hosted a U.S. imam who promoted religious tolerance in television and radio appearances.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 39.5 million (July 2015 estimate), more than 99 percent of which is Sunni Muslim. Groups together constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Christians, Jews, Ahmadi Muslims, Shia Muslims, and a community of Ibadi Muslims principally residing in the province of Ghardaia. Some religious leaders estimate there are fewer than 200 Jews.

The Christian community includes Roman Catholics, Protestant groups such as Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, L'Eglise Reforme (Reformed Church), Anglicans, and an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Egyptian Coptic Christians. Religious leaders' unofficial estimates of the total number of Christians in the country range from 20,000 to 100,000. Although numbers cannot be confirmed, church leaders say foreign residents make up the majority of the Christian population. One Christian leader estimates his church has between 20,000 and 40,000 foreign members, compared to fewer than 100 citizen members. The proportion of students and illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa among the Christian population is also increasing. Christian leaders say Algerian citizen Christians predominantly belong to Protestant groups. Christians reside mostly in the cities of Algiers, Annaba, and Oran. The Protestant community has an evangelical wing, most of whose members live in the Kabylie region.

### **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

#### **Legal Framework**

The constitution provides for the inviolable freedom of conscience and opinion. It declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits state institutions from engaging in behavior incompatible with Islamic values.

The penal code does not contain a provision making conversion or apostasy a crime. Proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims, however, is a criminal offense and carries a maximum punishment of one million dinars (\$11,400) and five years' imprisonment for anyone who "incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction

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tending to convert a Muslim to another religion; or by using to this end establishments of teaching, education, health, social, culture, training...or any financial means.” Making, storing, or distributing printed documents or audiovisual materials with the intent of “shaking the faith” of a Muslim may also be punished in this manner.

The law criminalizes “offending the Prophet Muhammad” or any other prophets. The penal code provides a punishment of three to five years in prison and/or a fine of 50,000 to 100,000 dinars (\$550 to \$1100) for denigrating the creed or prophets of Islam through writing, drawing, declaration or any other means. The law also criminalizes insults to any other religion, with the same penalties.

The law grants all individuals the right to practice their religion as long as they respect public order and regulations.

The constitution states the High Islamic Council shall promote the consistency of laws with the Quran (*Ijtihad*), by expressing opinions on matters not mentioned in the Quran and other sources of Islam. The president appoints the members of the council and oversees its work. The constitution requires the council to submit regular reports to the president on its activities. A presidential decree further defines the council’s mission as taking responsibility for all questions related to Islam, for correcting mistaken perceptions, and for promoting the true fundamentals of the religion and a correct understanding of it. The council may issue fatwas at the request of the president.

The law requires a group to register with the government as an association prior to conducting any activities. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) grants association status to religious groups; only registered associations are officially recognized. MOI’s registration requirements for national-level associations stipulate the founding members must furnish documents proving their identities, addresses, and other biographic details; furnish police and judicial records to prove their good standing in society; show they have members residing in at least one-quarter of the country’s provinces to prove the association merits national standing; submit the association’s constitution signed by its president; and submit documents indicating the location of its headquarters. The law requires the ministry to provide a receipt for the application and to give a timely response to the application, within 60 days after submission. The law states that associations are de facto registered 60 days from the date on their receipt of submission of an application. The law grants the government full discretion in registration decisions, but provides applicants an

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opportunity to appeal by resubmitting an application for reconsideration by the ministry if denied.

Religious associations must additionally be approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA), which advises whether a religious group conforms with requirements for an organization. For associations seeking to register at the local or provincial level, application requirements are similar, but the association's membership and sphere of activity is strictly limited to the area in which it registers. An association registered at the *wilaya* (provincial) level is confined to a specific *wilaya*.

The National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups, a government entity, is responsible by law for facilitating the registration process for all non-Muslim groups. The MRA presides over the commission, composed of senior representatives of the Ministries of National Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs, the presidency, the national police, the national gendarmerie, and the governmental National Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CNCPPDH). The legal mandate of CNCPPDH to address human rights complaints allows it to address concerns of individuals and groups who believe they are not being treated fairly by the MRA.

Islamic services, with the exception of daily prayers, may take place only in state-sanctioned mosques. Daily prayers may take place anywhere. The government may shut down any religious service taking place in private homes or in outdoor settings without official approval. The law specifies the manner and conditions under which religious services may take place, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. A request for permission to observe special non-Muslim religious events must be submitted to the relevant *wali* (governor) at least five days before the event, and the event must occur in buildings accessible to the public. Requests must include information on three principal organizers of the event, its purpose, the number of attendees anticipated, a schedule of events, and its planned location. The organizers also must obtain a permit indicating this information and present it to authorities upon request. The *wali* can request the organizers move the location of an event or deny permission for it to take place if it is deemed a danger to public order. If unauthorized meetings go forward without approval, participants are subject to dispersal by the police. Failure to disperse at the behest of the police may result in arrest and a prison term of two to twelve months under the penal code.

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The penal code states only government-authorized imams, who are hired and trained by the state, may lead prayer in mosques and penalizes anyone other than a government-authorized imam who preaches in a mosque with fines of up to 100,000 dinars (\$1,100) and prison sentences of one to three years. Fines as high as 200,000 dinars (\$2,300) and prison sentences of three to five years are stipulated for any person, including government-authorized imams, who acts “against the noble nature of the mosque” or in a manner “likely to offend public cohesion.” Among such acts, the law states, are exploiting the mosque to achieve purely material or personal objectives or with a view to harming people or groups.

By law, the MRA provides financial support to mosques and pays the salaries of imams and religious personnel. The law also provides for the payment of salaries to non-Muslim religious leaders who are citizens, as well as health care and retirement benefits. The Ministry of Labor regulates the amount of an individual imam’s or mosque personnel’s pay, and likewise sets the salaries of citizen non-Muslim religious leaders based on their position within their individual churches.

The family code prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men unless the man converts to Islam. The code does not prohibit Muslim men from marrying non-Muslim women, provided the woman belongs to a religion included under the term “people of the book” (Christian or Jewish).

The Ministries of Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Commerce must approve the importation of non-Islamic religious writings. Citizens and foreigners may legally import personal copies of non-Islamic religious texts.

The law states all structures intended for non-Muslim collective worship must be registered with the state; any modification of such structures must have prior government approval, and collective worship may take place only in structures exclusively intended and approved for that purpose.

Under the law, children born to a Muslim father are considered Muslim regardless of the mother’s religion.

The Ministries of National Education and Religious Affairs require, regulate, and fund the study of Islam in public schools. Religious education, which focuses on Islam but includes information on Christianity and Judaism, is mandatory at the primary and secondary school levels. The Ministry of National Education requires private schools to adhere to curricula in line with national standards, particularly

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regarding the teaching of Islam and the use of Arabic as the primary language of instruction, or risk being closed.

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion and guarantees state protection for non-Muslims and for the “toleration and respect of different religions.”

The constitution prohibits non-Muslims from running for the presidency. Non-Muslims may hold other public offices and work within the government.

The law prohibits religious associations from receiving funding from political parties or foreign entities.

### Government Practices

The government sentenced a journalist in absentia for “offending the Prophet Muhammad,” and delayed the journalist’s appeal. There continued to be no developments in the appeals of two Christians who had been arrested and tried in prior years, one for proselytizing and one for “offending the Prophet Muhammad.” Some Christian groups continued to face a range of administrative difficulties in the absence of a written government response to their requests for recognition as associations. In June security forces attempted to break up a group of individuals eating and drinking in private during Ramadan. The government announced the replacement of volunteer imams at 55 mosques in Algiers for “spreading Salafism.” In November the Ministry provided authorization to import Bibles and religious materials; Christians had been seeking this approval to import these texts since May 2014. Christian leaders stated the lack of government responsiveness to visa applications continued to pose complications for religious workers. Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, including the minister, continued to state publicly the government’s willingness to accommodate minority faiths who wished to practice in the country by opening places of worship.

The judiciary sentenced journalist Mohamed Chergui in absentia, on February 24, to three years imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 dinars (\$2,300) for “insulting the Prophet” following charges filed by the newspaper which had employed him. Chergui had authored an article in mid-2014 about European research on “Quranic expressions,” which had prompted the newspaper to fire him and pursue a legal complaint. He appealed; his appeal was postponed three times during the year and

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remained in this status as of the end of the year. His lawyers lodged a countercomplaint against the paper on labor-practice grounds.

There were no developments in the appeal case of Mohamed Ibaouene, a Christian in Tizi Ouzou who had been convicted in absentia in 2012 of pressuring a local Muslim to convert from Islam, which was the most recent government prosecution of a proselytization case.

An appeal hearing continued to be delayed for Abdelkrim Siaghi, a Christian convert who had been sentenced to five years in prison in May 2011 for offending the Prophet Muhammad.

The Protestant Church reported in December the authorities had arrested a Christian in Mostaganem; the Church leader stated his suspicion the arrest was motivated by the man's religious identity. Two police had reportedly stopped the man and asked him if he was a local who was preaching the Gospel, which he did not deny. The police searched his car and found four Bibles and a small utility knife with his tools in his trunk. The police released him but the next day arrested him for "possession of a weapon." He was jailed for one week, tried on December 7, acquitted, and released.

Christian leaders reported being able to visit foreign Christians, most of whom were migrants, in prison. One church leader reported the non-Muslim prison population, to his knowledge, consisted of people convicted for nonreligious offenses, sometimes related to their illegal status within the country.

MRA representatives, including the minister of religious affairs, continued to make public statements warning against the spread of "extremist" Salafism, Wahhabism, Shia Islam, Ahmadi Islam, and the Bahai Faith. For example, in a radio interview in June, Minister Aissa stated Wahhabism had "no place" in the country. On July 16, Minister Aissa made a public statement warning about the dangers of radical Salafism, as well as the "intrusion" of Shia Islam.

Senior government officials publicly condemned acts of violence committed in the name of Islam by nonstate actors, and urged all members of society to reject extremist behavior. Foreign Minister Lamamra represented the country in the international march against terrorism that took place in Paris in January following the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*. In response to terrorist attacks in other countries during the year, including in Tunisia, Kuwait, Somalia, Lebanon, France, and

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Turkey, the government issued statements calling the attacks “criminal acts” for taking innocent human lives in contradiction to the tenets of Islam.

On June 22, the minister of religious affairs announced the government had replaced volunteer imams at 55 mosques in Algiers for “spreading Salafism.” The government said it had permitted the volunteers to take up imams’ duties at these mosques in earlier years, but was rescinding the temporary authorization for these volunteers to preach, and replacing them with state-approved imams.

The government continued to recognize a number of non-Muslim religious groups as religious associations, including the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. The Protestant Church of Algeria – a federation of approximately 39 smaller Protestant churches – and some other groups which had been registered under the previous associations law remained engaged in the process of reregistering with the government under the new associations law of 2012.

MRA officials stated the delay in approvals had arisen because the government had hoped to issue a refinement of the law specifically to address religious associations. The MRA stated it had never rejected a registration application for a religious group. Along with the Protestant Church of Algeria, the Seventh-day Adventist and Reformed Churches also had registration requests pending with the government and were not clear what their registration standing was. Some had submitted their paperwork and, under the law, were de facto approved after 60 days, but without official papers to show affirming their approval, still faced the same administrative constraints as unregistered associations. Members of these churches reported there continued to be no government interference with their holding religious services, but said they continued to face administrative and bureaucratic difficulties as a result of their lack of documented registered status, including a lack of standing to pursue legal complaints, an inability to open bank accounts or establish related charitable activities, and difficulty managing church billing accounts without documented standing as an association. Most Christian leaders stated they had had no contact with the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups, despite its legal mandate to work with them on registration, since its establishment in 2006. Christian leaders stated some Protestant groups continued to avoid applying for recognition and instead operated discreetly because they lacked confidence in the registration process.

MRA officials said Muslim associations remained equally burdened under this process because the opening of every new mosque required the formation of an



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association under the law. Government officials stated the law was designed to apply the same constraints to non-Muslims as those imposed on Muslims, including stipulating the compliance of religious rites with the law and respect for public order, morality, and the rights and basic freedoms of others.

According to some Christian leaders, individuals and groups who believed they were not being treated fairly by the MRA rarely addressed their concerns to the CNCPPDH. The MRA said it instructed employees of the agencies making up the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups to enforce fairly the ordinance which prohibited religious discrimination, and it prohibited its employees from manipulating application of the law based on the employees' own beliefs.

In November, in response to remarks by Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who urged Algerian Shiites to practice their faith openly, religious leaders publicly called al-Sadr's statement "dangerous" interference in the country's life. Minister Aissa stated Shia in the country discussed their faith in universities and in their private lives, but Shia "ideology" was not present in the country's mosques.

According to national press, on June 24, during Ramadan, security forces entered a commercial establishment to break up a group of nonfasting customers who were eating during daylight, out of public view. The press reported the security forces gave the individuals back their identity papers and left the establishment when the group verbally resisted the security forces' intervention. Afterwards, approximately a dozen citizens reportedly assembled at the location to show solidarity with the nonfasting clients' rights to freedom of conscience. The minister of religious affairs, ministry officials, and preachers publicly reiterated the government's position on fasting as a purely private choice. MRA officials stated the involvement of security forces in demonstrations by either nonfasting or pro-fasting citizens was to prevent clashes and uphold public order. The government also stated breaking the fast was not a criminal act, but security forces, in order to uphold public order, were authorized to break up "collective" fast-breaking on the grounds it was socially disruptive.

The government continued to prescreen and approve sermons before they were delivered publicly during Friday prayers, and sometimes provided preapproved sermon topics for Friday prayers, for example to urge compliance with government-led public campaigns against violence or corruption.

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According to information provided by MRA officials, if a ministry inspector suspected an imam's sermon was inappropriate, the inspector had the authority to summon the imam to a "scientific council" composed of Islamic law scholars and other imams who assessed the sermon's correctness. The government could decide to relieve an imam of duty if he was summoned multiple times. The government also monitored activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses and prohibited the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours.

Judiciary officials in November summoned nine local Shia converts and a number of local Salafists in connection with an anonymous threatening letter sent to a police officer in Tlemcen, according to a local press article. The authorities also opened an investigation into Shia converts in the country. The citizens summoned by the officials denied any connection with the threats of violence and stated they had a right, under the constitution, to convert to another belief. The prosecutor's office also sought the counsel of the Ministry of Religious Affairs about how to handle Shia converts. The security services did not release the contents of the letter or explain why the letter had triggered the investigation into Shia converts and anti-Shia Salafist citizens.

The government continued not to permit non-Muslim groups to proselytize, but continued to allow them to conduct humanitarian activities. A Christian representative stated continued government observance of the ordinance against proselytizing by non-Muslims resulted in their church restricting some nonproselytization activities.

There were no reported cases of government prosecution of Christian citizens who continued to meet in unofficial "house churches," which were often homes or businesses of church members. Authorities reportedly did not prosecute practitioners as long as house churches otherwise respected public order. Some of these groups met openly, while others held worship services more discreetly. These groups were most frequently reported in the Kabylie region. Ministry of Religious Affairs officials privately urged such groups to come forward and operate in the open, saying the country tolerated religious minorities.

Christian leaders stated internment costs for a Christian burial in both public and private cemeteries continued to be higher than for a Muslim burial rite and said this was due to discrimination. Christian leaders said members who had converted were sometimes buried by their parents according to Muslim rites and the church

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had no standing to intervene on their behalf. Christian groups reported some villages continued not to permit Christians to be buried alongside Muslims. The government stated people whose lifestyle gave the impression they were non-Muslims were buried in Muslim cemeteries on the basis of their family's testimonies. A ministry official stated where burial grounds were private, the cases were outside of the government's domain.

According to the MRA, the government continued to allow female government employees to wear the hijab, crosses, and the *niqab* (Islamic veil covering the face). Authorities continued to instruct some female government employees, such as security forces, not to wear head and face coverings which could complicate the performance of their official duties.

The government did not always enforce the family code prohibition against Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men.

Government-owned radio stations continued to broadcast Christmas and Easter services in French, although many Christians said they would prefer services to be broadcast in Arabic or Tamazight.

Government officials continued to invite Christian leaders to events celebrating national occasions according them the same status as Muslim, cultural, and national figures. The Ministry of Religious Affairs reported it held consultations with a representative of the Jewish community to discuss the community's views.

For most of the year, the government continued to restrict the large-scale importation of non-Islamic religious texts. In May local press reported on Christian leaders' complaints the government had not approved the importation of Bibles or religious materials since May 2014, and described the steps Christian leaders had taken to attempt to address this issue with the government. In November the government granted official permission to import Christian religious texts for one authorized organization, which has sole standing to import Bibles on behalf of all Christian entities in the country. Citizens and foreigners continued to be allowed to import personal copies of non-Islamic texts. Throughout the year, non-Islamic religious texts, music, and video media continued to be available on the informal market, and stores and vendors in the capital sold Bibles in several languages, including Arabic, French, and Tamazight. The government enforced its prohibition on dissemination of any literature portraying violence as a legitimate precept of Islam.

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Protestant leaders continued seeking to regain property rights to five churches reportedly given to the Protestant Church of Algeria during the 1970s, but occupied by other groups when the churches were vacated the properties during the internal conflict in the 1990s. The Church leaders said some local officials blocked their efforts while permitting other associations to make use of the space. One church group said it continued to meet only thanks to a separate church which permitted the group to borrow its facility, as the group had lost access to its former site and could not obtain its own new space.

The government, along with private contributions from local Muslims, continued to fund mosque construction. The government and public and private companies also funded the preservation of some churches, particularly those of historical importance. The province of Oran, for example, undertook in partnership with local benefactors an extensive renovation of Notre-Dame de Santa Cruz as part of its cultural patrimony.

The minister of religious affairs in press remarks in June stated the government's willingness to respond to a request to open a synagogue, while saying Jewish religious authorities did not believe there was a large enough Jewish community to require a synagogue. A ministry official said the ministry would be equally willing to open any other religious place of worship at the request of a minority population.

The 28 members of the MRA educational commission, which had developed the curriculum for teaching the Quran, continued to ensure imams were qualified and followed governmental guidelines aimed at countering violent extremism.

Christian leaders expressed continued concern over the potential for requests by non-Muslims to opt-out of the Islamic-based school courses to lead to societal abuse or discrimination.

Members of non-Muslim religious groups continued to report disadvantages in inheritance claims if a Muslim family member laid claim to the same inheritance.

On October 16, the president's chief of staff, speaking also as head of the National Democratic Rally at a party meeting, stated the leader of the regional Movement for Self-Determination of Kabylie (MAK) was trying to "help the Zionists" and accused him of "selling Algeria to the Jews." In an interview responding to the

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chief of staff's remarks, the MAK leader denounced the use of a "racist phrase," which he said increased "anti-Semitism and the hatred of Jews."

The MRA continued to support and help organize conferences on interfaith dialogue. Government officials regularly made statements about the need for tolerance for non-Islamic religious groups. During Ramadan, the government continued to dedicate numerous media programs to promoting interfaith tolerance, a message the government instructed imams to amplify in their sermons.

Church groups continued to report government delays in responding to the visa applications of religious workers, with the government often providing no response rather than a documented refusal. Both Catholic and Protestant groups continued to identify this as a significant hindrance to religious practice; one Protestant leader said without visits to establish better contact with their church's international organization, the congregation's practices might "drift." Visas granted by the government continued to be short-stay tourist visas, rather than the requested long-term work visas; religious leaders reported recipients of these visas were uncomfortable working with churches while on tourist visas. Higher-level intervention with the officials responsible for visa issuance by senior MRA and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials at the request of religious groups continued typically to result in the issuance of such visas, according to religious groups.

Christians reported they continued to encounter refusals or delays when seeking government authorization to give Biblical names to their children, but said a second request following a refusal typically led to approval. The MRA stated similar delays sometimes occurred with "foreign" sounding names, Tamazight names, or Arab names which were uncommon locally, and attributed delays in approving Biblical names to overzealous local officials, who were unfamiliar with the proposed names and required additional time to seek higher-level approval.

### **Abuses by Foreign Forces and Non-State Actors**

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, a group designated by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization, continued to target members of the country's military, its military facilities, and other symbols of the government, claiming the government was an "apostate regime." The group took responsibility for the killing of nine soldiers in Ain Defla Province during the Eid al-Fitr holiday in July. The Jund al-Khalifa group, which swore allegiance to Da'esh, claimed responsibility for attacking police and gendarmes, for example, in Skikda in August and in Bourira

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in July and August, and continued to call for violence against those who disagreed with its interpretation of Islam.

### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Local press reported an outbreak of communal violence and unrest between Arabs, who were mostly Maliki Muslims, and Mozabites, who were mostly Ibadi Muslims, on July 7-8 in central Ghardaia Province, leading to the deaths of at least 22 citizens, as containing a religious component. In an interview conducted in Ghardaia following the violence, however, the prime minister rejected characterizing the conflict as a religious one. The minister of religious affairs did so as well, saying there were many roots to the conflict. He said foreign Salafist groups were attempting to manipulate the characterization of the conflict and trying to turn it into a religious one. He urged the country to stop referring to the conflict as one between Ibadis and Maliki Muslims, saying this risked further communal divisions. The government said Arab and Mozabite community leaders in Ghardaia also stated the region's problems did not stem from religious or doctrinal disputes.

Following the new publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad by French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* after the killing of members of its editorial staff by terrorists in January, hundreds of citizens in Algiers, Oran, and other cities held demonstrations in support of the Prophet Muhammad on January 16 after midday prayers. The organizers said the demonstrations were to show participants did not support the *Je suis Charlie* global movement or the publication of cartoons of the Prophet, even while condemning the killings. Most of the demonstrations reportedly were peaceful, but two marches in Algiers saw clashes between police and local youths. The press reported the police arrested but quickly released 23 individuals; several police officers were reportedly injured. The media reported some demonstrators chanted slogans originated by the Islamic Salvation Front, an Islamist political party involved in the civil war during the 1990s.

Author and journalist Kamel Daoud, whom a Salafist activist had accused of apostasy in 2014, continued to receive negative comments on social media sites following continued media coverage of his writings.

Several Christian leaders reported instances where citizens who converted, or who expressed interest in learning more about Christianity, were assaulted by family members, or otherwise pressured to recant their conversion.

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Muslim citizens who converted to Christianity reported they and others in their communities continued to keep a low profile due to their concern for their personal safety and potential legal, familial, career, and social problems. Other citizens who converted to Christianity continued to practice their new religion openly, however, according to members of the Christian community.

Christian leaders continued to report cases in which Muslim parents successfully pressured their Muslim children to divorce their Christian spouses. Among those who openly practiced any non-Sunni-Muslim religion, many reported that family, neighbors, or members of the general population criticized their choice to practice such a religion, harassing them to convert, and occasionally, insinuating they could be in danger for their choice. Some Christian parents reported their children were reprimanded in school for openness about their religion.

Jewish citizens said they continued to try to keep their religious identity private, while otherwise engaging with society. Several non-Muslim residents stated the public's anti-Israeli foreign policy views sometimes translated into anti-Semitism. For example, YouTube users in October created an online video, entitled *Jews in the Streets of Algeria: What Will Happen?* The video depicted a young man pretending to be Jewish (wearing a kippah) approaching people on the streets of Algiers; those he approached then appeared to insult, harass, or assault him. The makers of the video concluded what they termed a "social experiment" by stating "Algerians do not want to smell the odor of Jews in their country." The video, which was posted during a time of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces in Jerusalem and the West Bank, received over 100,000 views and over 1,000 likes on YouTube.

In May and June in advance of the month of Ramadan, social media users started a campaign urging men to compel their wives, daughters, and sisters to veil and to wear only clothing compliant with a conservative interpretation of Islamic mores. Some commentators on the campaign's Facebook page promised "retribution" against women who went out uncovered, threatening to publish pictures of unveiled women on the internet, or attack such women by pouring acid on their faces. The General Directorate of National Security investigated the issue, but did not make the results of the investigation public. There were no reports the group had followed through on its threats.

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According to local press, on June 25, a group of people in Oran held a demonstration in favor of the freedom of conscience to observe – or not observe – the fast during the month of Ramadan. According to press, this was the first time Oran had witnessed such demonstrations, although some reportedly had taken place during the last two years in the Kabylie region.

Some Muslims continued to show an interest in Catholic places of worship, including visiting them for prayer; Catholic contacts report this was because Catholic religious figures such as the Virgin Mary were mentioned in the Quran. In some areas of major cities, observers reported shops sold Christmas trees and decorations.

There were reports that non-Muslims lost their jobs due to their employers discovering their religious affiliations, causing non-Muslims to conceal their religious affiliation.

One church reported it had a problem with local youth attempting to trespass onto its grounds to commit vandalism; the church said local security forces were supportive and subsequently boosted security around the site.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officers met with government officials to discuss the difficulties Christian groups faced in registering as associations, in importing religious materials, and in obtaining visas. Embassy officers also addressed the government's stance toward minority Muslim communities.

The Ambassador and other embassy officers met throughout the year with government-affiliated and independent religious leaders, and representatives of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities to discuss interreligious dialogue and tolerance, and in the case of religious minorities, their rights and status.

The embassy sponsored a reunion concert of an interfaith Jewish-Muslim ensemble – its first performance in the country since the country's independence – to support religious dialogue and tolerance. The group had declined previous invitations from other sponsors because these had excluded the participation of its Jewish members who had departed the country shortly after its independence along with most of the Jewish community.



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The embassy also sponsored the visit of a U.S. imam, who made appearances at the University of Islamic Sciences in Constantine and at a Ramadan iftar hosted by the Ambassador, among other venues, to promote the importance of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance in addressing the country's societal and security challenges. In addition, the imam emphasized these themes in television and radio appearances. Listeners and viewers reacted positively to the imam's speeches on social media sites, saying he offered them a new perspective on tolerance and interfaith coexistence.

The embassy discussed the practice of religion, its intersection with politics, and the religious and political roles of women with Islamist political parties and Islamic political figures, as well as with the Muslim Scholars Association. Several Muslim scholars, a representative of a Sufi order, nongovernmental organizations' leaders, and members of Islamist political parties participated in embassy-supported international exchange programs and in U.S. government-funded international conferences about countering violent extremism and promoting religious moderation and tolerance.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris against the offices of the newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, the embassy hosted a special discussion session for local youth to promote religious tolerance, and to stress the value of freedom of expression even at the risk of defamation of religion.

During Ramadan, the Ambassador filmed Eid al-Adha greetings supporting religious pluralism to the country's Muslims, and engaged on social media to share examples of pluralism and religious tolerance. The Ambassador also hosted several iftars, which emphasized the theme of religious tolerance.