

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

July 09, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write with regard to recent incidents in Algeria that signal the rise of coordinated and discriminatory treatment towards members of religious minority groups. These groups include the Ahmadiyya Muslim community as well as Protestant Christians. The incidents involve the Algerian government's recent criminal charges against Ahmadis and Christians for allegedly blasphemous or religiously offensive actions, as well as discriminatory church closures against Protestant Christians in Algeria (the *Église Protestante d'Algérie*, or EPA). We respectfully request that the State Department raise these concerns with senior Algerian officials and ask that they quickly investigate these incidents and put a stop to any discriminatory actions in accordance with Algeria's international and constitutional commitments to religious freedom.

In its latest Report on International Religious Freedom, the U.S. Department of State outlined numerous examples of Ahmadi Muslims being unfairly targeted by the Algerian government. For example, in December 2020, dozens of Ahmadis were tried and convicted in the court in Tizi Ouzou for offending the Prophet Mohammad, distributing religious leaflets, and engaging in worship without registration. This comes despite the fact that the Algerian government has refused to grant Ahmadis official religious status (even though the group has attempted to register for the designation). Similarly, other Ahmadis remain unjustly and discriminatorily imprisoned and detained. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has expressed concern over the escalating persecution of Ahmadis in Algeria¹ as well. In January 2020, a Christian in Oran Province was arrested on charges that he allegedly shared an image offensive to Islam on social media. He was convicted a year later in January 2021 and sentenced to the maximum penalty of five years in prison. The sentence was upheld in March 2021.² At least two other Christians were sentenced to prison on blasphemy charges in December 2020.³ Another Protestant Christian—a pastor—was convicted in February 2021 of proselytizing, and his appeals are ongoing.⁴

Algeria is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Article 51 of the Algerian

¹ <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-troubled-escalating-persecution-ahmadi-muslims-algeria>

² <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/26/algerian-christian-prison-sentence-upheld/>

³ <https://barnabasfund.org/news/algerian-christian-given-five-year-prison-sentence-for-blasphemy/>

⁴ <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/11/algerian-christians-receive-prison-sentences-absentia/>

Constitution guarantees the freedoms of conscience, opinion and worship. These recent actions appear to be in violation of both international law and Algeria's constitution, – indicating systematic and increasing persecution of religious minorities. To comply with its international obligations, the Algerian government should release Ahmadis and Christians who have been convicted of blasphemy or related charges, should ensure their safety against any retaliation, and should guarantee them the right to freely practice their faith, alone and in community with others.

In December 2020, Congress overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan resolution calling for the repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws throughout the world, once again demonstrating bipartisan commitment to international religious freedom. In that spirit, we reiterate our deep concern with the treatment of religious minority groups in Algeria and recognize that the freedom to practice one's faith freely is one of our nation's most sacred values and a universal human right. We urge you to continue to promote a foreign policy that advances religious freedom across the globe and take serious action against countries engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Tim Kaine
U.S. Senator



Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator



Cory A. Booker
U.S. Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senator