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ALGERIA Six Christians arrested

International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that six Algerian Christians were arrested in El Tarf on Saturday for worshipping in an unregistered location. Five remain in prison on charges of proselytizing and blasphemy after appearing in court on Sunday.

On October 29, the six Algerian Christians were arrested before their morning prayer service in an apartment not authorized as a legal place of worship, the independent daily El Watan reported. The arrests occurred in a village near Bougous, located in the north-eastern province of El Tarf which borders Tunisia.

The next day, the Criminal Court of El Tarf held five of the six Christians in custody for proselytizing, unauthorized worship, and insulting Islam, according to Algérie Plus. The sixth Christian, a minor, was released and placed on probation. Local congregants expect a trial to take place in the coming days.

According to Algerian press, the Christians are affiliated with the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), though their affiliation has not yet been confirmed by the EPA. In July, the Algerian government authorized the EPA to apply for official registration, but many congregations have not yet begun the process of registration and continue to worship in secret.

The arrests were in accordance with Ordinance 06-03, which was established in 2006 to regulate the worship of non-Muslims by requiring churches to obtain government permission to hold services. The ordinance also states that Christians must worship in recognized buildings, not houses or apartments.

The arrests occurred days before the trial of Siagh Krimo, an Algerian Christian who is scheduled to appear in an appeals court in Oran on November 3. Krimo was arrested and briefly imprisoned on April 14 after sharing his Christian faith with a neighbor. If his verdict stands, Krimo will be given a five year prison sentence for blasphemy.

Aidan Clay, ICC Regional Manager for the Middle East, said, *"While progress was made earlier this year when the Algerian government permitted the EPA to apply for registration, provincial authorities are undermining that decision by detaining Christians on baseless charges and denying congregations their foundational right to worship freely. We urge officials in El Tarf to release the five Christians still in prison. Additionally, we call for the acquittal of Siagh Krimo in Oran whose prison term may be enforced as early as Thursday."*

Please contact the Algerian Embassies in the U.S. (202) 265-2800, the UK (020) 7221-7800, and Canada (613) 789- 8505 and ask them to urge officials in El Tarf to release the five Christians still in prison and acquit Siagh Krimo of blasphemy charges.