

## U.S. Pastors Praise Morocco As Christian Serves Jail Sentence For Evangelism

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RABAT / WASHINGTON -- A Christian is serving 15 years in a Moroccan jail for evangelism, a Christian rights groups said, while American Christian leaders praised Morocco Thursday, June 17, for its "long history of friendship and religious cooperation."

Jamaa Ait Bakim is currently imprisoned for "proselytizing," a charge punishable under Moroccan law, said Washington based International Christian Concern (ICC), a major advocacy group closely following the case. The Christian man is currently serving a 15 year sentence in Prison Centrale, located in the coastal city of Kenitra, Morocco, the group told Worthy News. Additionally, Morocco expelled at least about 100 Christian foreigners, including foster parents forced to leave their children behind, Western diplomats and aid agencies said, but other Christian sources say that figure is even higher. ICC made the announcement just hours before the U.S. based National Clergy Council, representing church leaders from numerous Christian denominations held a press conference in the nation's capital to present their "positive experiences in the Kingdom of Morocco over the last six years." "Morocco is virtually unique in the Arab-speaking world. It has consistently topped the lists of religiously tolerant Islamic countries," said National Clergy Council president, Reverend Rob Schenck. He said, "Large numbers of Christians have lived and worked in Morocco for centuries. Hundreds of Christians continue to live in Morocco today."

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Schenk added that the relatively young King Mohammed VI has led "unprecedented reforms in human rights, women's rights and family law. Of the more than 40 countries I have visited, Morocco is by far one of the most friendly and hospitable."

However, according to article 220 of Moroccan Criminal law, it is illegal to "shake the faith of a Muslim." Charges of proselytizing have led to the mass deportation Christian foreigners from Morocco over the past three months, said Counsel Roger Kiska of the U.S.-based Alliance Defense Fund.

"Christians shouldn't be targeted for deportation simply because of their beliefs," said Kiska, who was scheduled to appear before the Human Rights Commission Thursday, June 18. "None of the preconditions for lawful deportation under Moroccan law was met by the government officials in this case. "It is vital that no precedent be set that will lead to more human rights violations of this sort, where Christian volunteers can be mass expelled simply because they are Christian," he said.

Republican Congressman Frank Wolf agrees. "I call on the government of Morocco to uphold its commitment to the principles of religious tolerance and freedom, that for so long, made it a model of tolerance and modernity in the Arab world," he said on the House floor recently.

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