

# FRANCE: Hate crime charges dropped in Paris trial of Muslim accused of killing Jewish neighbor

JTA.org (01.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2E47Vte> – A judge in Paris scrapped hate crime charges from the indictment of a murder suspect who confessed to killing his Jewish neighbor.

The move came amid a rise in reported violent anti-Semitic attacks in France.

The Paris Prosecutor's office said it would appeal the dismissal Monday of the aggravated element of a hate crime in the trial of Kobili Traore, a 28-year-old Muslim man who on April 4 threw his neighbor, Sarah Halimi, to her death from the window of her third-story apartment.

The charge of murder aggravated by racial hatred was excluded from what is now the indictment against Traore by the examining magistrate – a function designed to oversee prosecutors and intercept flawed indictments before they form the basis of an active trial.

Francis Kalifat, president of the Jewish umbrella group CRIF, told Le Parisien daily that the examining magistrate's move was "an insult" to Halimi's memory.

Separately, the Interior Ministry of France on Wednesday reported a 7.2 percent decrease in 2017 in the number of anti-Semitic attacks in the country over 2016. The ministry recorded 311 cases. But of those, 97 were classified as violent assaults – a 25 percent increase over 2016, Le Figaro reported.

The SPCJ watchdog unit of French Jewry, which receives and collects reports independently to the Interior Ministry, has not yet published its report for 2017.

In the Halimi case, Traore was heard shouting about Allah and calling her “a devil” in Arabic. Halimi’s daughter said he had called the daughter a “dirty Jewess” in the building two years before the murder. But the examining magistrate in Traore’s trial, which opened this week, dismissed the aggravated hate crime charge before the trial actually began, Le Parisien reported Wednesday. Traore is pleading temporary insanity, though he has no history of mental illness.

For months after the slaying of the 66-year-old Jewish physician, leaders of French Jewry urged authorities to include the aggravated element of a hate crime in the draft indictment against Traore. They finally agreed in September.

The incident occurred months before France’s general election, in which the French political establishment was bracing for unprecedented gains for the far-right National Front party.

Marine Le Pen, the anti-immigration party's leader, received a historic third of the vote in the final round of the presidential elections, which she lost to the centrist candidate, Emmanuel Macron.

Many French Jews believe authorities and the media covered up or ignored the alleged anti-Semitic elements connected to Halimi's suspected murder to prevent it from becoming fodder for Le Pen's divisive campaign.

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**Iran must ensure rights of Christian minority and fair trial for the accused– UN**

# experts

OHCHR (2.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2E2djgj> – UN human rights experts\* have called on Iran to ensure a fair and transparent final hearing for three Iranian Christians who are due to appear before the Revolutionary Court in Tehran this weekend.

“We are deeply concerned by the long jail sentences imposed at a previous hearing on Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, Amin Afshar Naderi and Hadi Asgari for allegedly ‘conducting evangelism’ and ‘illegal house church activities’, and similar charges that, according to the authorities, amount to acting against national security, completely contrary to Iran’s international obligations under the UDHR and the ICCPR” the four Special Rapporteurs said in a joint statement.

“We are additionally concerned about the lack of healthcare made available to them while in detention and, in particular, about the current health condition of Mr. Asgari who remains in prison,” they added.

“We strongly call on the Government to ensure that the final review hearing on Sunday is fair and transparent, in accordance with Iran’s obligations under international human rights law,” the experts said.

The Revolutionary Court judge has the power to end the case, confirm the sentences or refer the case to the Supreme Court, with the men either freed on bail or jailed in the meantime.

The three Christians were given provisional jail sentences of 10 years at a previous hearing in July. Mr. Naderi received an additional five years for blasphemy.

The experts say they are also concerned that the prosecution of the three Christians is not an isolated case.

“We are aware of several other reported cases in which members of the Christian minority have received heavy sentences after being charged with ‘threatening national security’, either for converting people or for attending house churches,” they said.

“This shows a disturbing pattern of individuals being targeted because of their religion or beliefs, in this case a religious minority in the country.

“Members of the Christian minority in Iran, particularly those who have converted to the faith, are facing severe discrimination and religious persecution.”

The UN experts stressed that it was “of paramount importance” for the Iranian Government to abide by its obligations under international human rights law.

“The authorities must ensure fair trials for all, including the religious minorities in the country,” they said.

“We also urge the Government to immediately and unconditionally release all those who have been arrested and detained for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.”

The UN experts notified the Government of Iran about their concerns.

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## **MALAYSIA: Church attacks highlight growth of Islamic extremism**

World Watch Monitor (31.01.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2FB9U4a> – Located within easy reach of three active centres of Islamic extremism – Mindanao in the Philippines, Arakan in Myanmar and the southern provinces of Thailand – Malaysia has become a

breeding ground for IS recruitment, weapon smuggling and communication, according to the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research.

In its latest report, the Singapore-based research centre says IS sympathisers number into the thousands in Malaysia and amount to a “virtual caliphate”, as reported by Free Malaysia Today.

But although they pose a real security threat, Malaysia’s Christians are generally unaware of the risk, a local source told World Watch Monitor.

“When we talked about IS in our [security] training, they do not show concern as they think it will not happen here,” the source said. “This could be due to lack of knowledge and exposure about the matter itself.”

Two attacks on churches were reported recently by The Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), the ecumenical body which includes the Province of South East Asia dioceses of Kuching, Sabah and West Malaysia.

In one of the incidents, shortly after the midnight service on 1 January, a “water bomb” made from modified fragments of fireworks exploded in front of the Luther Centre in Petaling Jaya, to the west of the capital Kuala Lumpur, injuring three Christians.

The general secretary of the CCM, Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri, said “police believe the attack on the Luther Centre was carried out by a ‘Mat Rempit’ – a gang-style individual who carries out public disturbances”.

A week later, a Methodist Church was attacked with a petrol bomb in Kota Bharu, a conservative city on the north-east of Peninsular Malaysia. The attack is believed to have been “motivated by extremists who are out to stoke the flames of religious intolerance in the country”, according to Rev. Shastri. Four weeks earlier, some objects thrown at the church had smashed its windows, Malaysia’s Star newspaper reported.

“We call on the police to reinforce their efforts to act firmly against this growing trend, where there are people committed to disrupting inter-religious harmony by targeting religious buildings with flagrant acts of vandalism and arson,” Rev. Shastri said. “Such actions if left unchecked may embolden extremists and unscrupulous elements to engage in such actions in the run up to the coming national General Elections in 2018.”

Religious extremism in Malaysia takes different shapes. In September last year, two laundrettes erected signs saying they would serve “Muslim customers only”. Following a rebuke from a local Muslim leader, one of the laundrettes replaced its sign with one stating “Muslim friendly”. At the other, the owner agreed to serve customers of all faiths after a visit from both the local mufti and the state crown prince.

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## **EGYPT: Church owner fined, attackers given suspended sentences**

World Watch Monitor (31.01.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2FCoyZh> – An Egyptian court today (31 January) found 15 people guilty of attacking a Coptic church south of Cairo, and also fined a Coptic man for illegally hosting the church on his premises.

The misdemeanour court in Giza governorate handed down one-year suspended jail sentences to the 15 attackers, with a fine equivalent to US\$28 each for “inciting sectarian strife, harming national unity and vandalising private property”, Reuters reported.

The Coptic owner of the premises in the village of Kafr al-Waslin received a fine equivalent to \$20,500 for hosting a

church without a licence.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that the building had served as meeting room for Copts, and a nursery, for more than 15 years.

On 22 December, a large group of Muslims gathered at the building after their Friday prayers, following a rumour that a church bell was to be put on the top of the building and that it would be turned into an official church. The group broke into the building and trashed the interior, chanting "Allahu Akbar" ("Allah is the greatest"), according to the source.

### ***Legalisation***

Reuters reported that the local diocese had applied for a license after the government passed its new church-building law in 2016.

In October last year, a cabinet committee started work on the legalisation of unlicensed churches, having received 2,650 requests from Coptic parishes waiting for a permit or license to renovate or build.

Earlier this month the Ministry of Housing announced that Christians were allowed to meet in unlicensed churches while their registration applications were processed.

For decades, the construction and renovation of churches in Egypt has been obstructed by complex bureaucracy, resulting in the deterioration of church buildings and a shortage of places of worship for Christians.

Tension between radical Muslims and Copts in rural villages has resulted in several churches being closed for security reasons.

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## **UGANDA: Refusal to convert to Islam ends in family tragedy**

World Watch Monitor (30.01.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2Gw2qA0> – A Christian woman has been brutally attacked with a machete by her Muslim husband for refusing to convert to his religion, sources told World Watch Monitor. The attack led to the death of the woman's one-week-old twins.

Regina Navatovu, 35, lived with her husband, Asuman Sekidde, in Bumogolo village in the south of Uganda. When Navatovu conceived in 2017, Sekidde claimed the children were not his and accused his wife of having an affair. Sekidde had started to threaten to hurt his wife before moving to Kalangala, more than 100km away, in Lake Victoria.

The twins were born on 18 December and Navatovu made contact with her husband to let him know. Sekidde returned on 22 December and that night attacked his wife and the newly-born children with a machete.

Neighbours helped take the mother and children to a local hospital. One of the twins died from a loss of blood, the other was unable to be kept warm by the unconscious mother and died from hypothermia, reported the Ugandan Daily Monitor. Navatovu lost her right hand and some fingers from her left hand in the attack.

Dr. Mark Juuko, a spokesman for Masaka Hospital, told local media that Navatovu was “still very weak and deeply traumatised”. He added that she was able to explain what happened but needs “much emotional support”.

“The local media reported that this was a case of proven adultery, but the real issue was not the paternity of the babies, it was about faith,” World Watch Monitor’s source said.

“Soon after they married, Sekidde started trying to get [his wife] to convert to Islam, but she kept resisting. This caused many disagreements between them. He only used the pregnancy as an excuse to try to get rid of her. In the recent past we have noticed an increase in domestic violence cases in households where Christian women are married to Muslims,” the source added.

Sekidde has been arrested and charged. He allegedly confessed to local reporters that he “hatched the attack [on his wife] hours before executing it”, and that he “wanted to cut off all [her] hands to teach her a lesson”.

Uganda is just outside the top 50 countries where persecution of Christians is most severe, according to the charity Open Doors’ 2018 World Watch List. The rise in radical Islamic activities in Uganda has created an environment of intolerance in the country, leaving Christians fearful of persecution, Open Doors said in its latest report.

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