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In numbers: French jihadist fighters and their families in Iraq and Syria

France's top anti-terrorism prosecutor on Friday released figures relating to French jihadists and their families in Iraq and Syria (VIDEO)

France24 (10.11.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2hqBtDB> - In an interview with French radio broadcaster FranceInfo on Friday, the country's top counter-terrorism Prosecutor François Molins discussed the French nationals who have left France to wage jihad in Iraq and Syria, including many women and the children being raised in these jihadist families.

Molins warned against having any "naivety" towards the French nationals who may be returning to France from the jihadist zones where Islamist groups are losing ground, saying they are "people who are disappointed, rather than repentant". Earlier this week, French President Emmanuel Macron said that the returnees would be carefully reviewed on a "case by case" basis.

- According to French intelligence services, 690 French nationals are currently fighting in Iraq and Syria
- Of those, 295 are women
- Some 28 French jihadist fighters are minors under the age of 15
- An estimated 400 children have either been born into French jihadist families in Iraq and Syria or have been brought to these countries by their parents
- A total of 398 French nationals have so far returned from the jihadist hotspots, and all of them have been placed under formal investigation
- Of those, 260 are currently in pre-trial detention and 138 are under judicial supervision, meaning they must regularly report to the authorities.

Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=9&v=IbMNncjvT2E

Of Refugees and Justice: the Calais evictions begin

By Mark Barwick, HRWF Policy Advisor

HRWF (02.03.2016) - This week the French government demonstrated how a country of high-minded ideals can become numb to its own values. Authorities began to evict people living in the refugee camp near Calais, known as the Jungle. The prefecture of Calais had won a court battle to begin clearing large parts of the southern portion of the camp, where about 3500 people have taken up residence, including hundreds of children, most of whom are unaccompanied by any adult.

The eviction did not go smoothly. The French journal *Libération* carried the headline: 'The authorities had assured that the evacuation would take place without violence. This was not the case.' Indeed, there have been scuffles on all sides, some provoked by activists in defence of the refugees, political militants such as groups like 'No Borders' and the settlers themselves. But there has never been question of who has been in control.

Br Johannes, a monk who has been living among the refugees in Calais with a small group of other volunteers, had this to say on Monday of this week:

Today the police started with the forced demolition of the camp. It goes above my understanding how a government and a police force can decide to go into a camp where minors and children live and actually use teargas grenades in the areas where mothers with babies are.

Only shortly before, the Iranian Christians had asked me to sit in front of their houses together with them and to pray for them - ten minutes later teargas canisters were shot into the camp, some of these projectiles were used to 'shoot' people off of their houses. People were treated for the teargas by the staff of Doctors without Borders, who constantly stayed present in the camp.

Yes, some of the youngsters responded by throwing stones at the police, but the volunteers tried to calm the situation down. Many of those volunteers and people joined in to extinguish the fires that started in that part of the camp.

The south part of the camp however was severely damaged today; many houses with people's only possessions inside were destroyed and removed.

This is a sad day for the people in the camp, people who have run away from such violence, from war and conflict, from poverty and police violence. They are people and youngsters who already suffer trauma - I am ashamed today - I am ashamed to be a European.

Regardless of the legality of the action which was taken yesterday, French officials are responsible to ensure the safety and resettlement of the refugee population near Calais, giving particular attention to the most vulnerable among them. Their action may be juridically correct; whether it is humane is quite a different matter.

The authorities are also responsible for the facilitation of asylum procedures to go forward within a reasonable period of time. This has not happened, contributing to the toxic environment that exists today. Likewise, the UK government must step up the processing of visas for those who have family members in their country. This could help break the bottleneck of factors that are driving the chaotic situation at this time.

Compromising freedoms clouds fight against terrorism

By Aaron Rhodes

Huff Post (14.01.2015) - A day after at least 1.5 million came out to protest the murder of Charlie Hebdo journalists and support freedom of speech, the French Minister of the Interior announced criminal proceedings against Dieudonné, a comedian, for his "apology for terrorism." After participating in the demonstration in Paris, Dieudonné posted that he felt like "Charlie Coulibaly," thus provocatively combining the name of the victimized publication with that of the terrorist who killed four Jews at a kosher supermarket a day after the *Charlie* attack.

Dieudonné had already been banned from performing in France for his harsh satire of Jews. French law criminalizes defamation and incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence against people based on their race or religion. But while the courts have ruled that *Charlie Hebdo's* irreverent cartoons spoofing the Pope and Mohammed did not constitute such an offence, they ruled differently against Dieudonné's caustic humor, fueling stories about a Jewish conspiracy, especially among Muslim youth. Less than a handful of public figures stood up for freedom of expression in his case.

It is not hard to see the crude political logic of prosecuting an anti-Semite following a massacre of Jews, especially given the recent spate of violence against Jews in France. But given that [previous efforts](#) to stifle Dieudonné's odious Jew-baiting have only made him into a celebrity, the utilitarian rationale is evidently flawed.

More importantly, the application of human rights principles needs to be above politics. The *Charlie Hebdo* terror murders were aimed at suppressing the exercise of one of the most fundamental human rights. The best way to repudiate this violence against freedom is not only to proclaim, but to demonstrate respect for human rights. Yet despite rhetoric about the value of free speech in the aftermath of the killings, French authorities have, in recent years, retreated from protecting the freedom of expression -- mostly in an attempt to avoid offending the Islamic community and ideological multiculturalists.

For years, French courts have been sentencing and fining citizens for speech critical of Islam. Cases recently [enumerated](#) by Guy Millière of the Gatestone Institute tell the story. There is widespread fear of speaking openly about radical or fundamentalist Islam, generating the use of politically correct code language or silent anxiety.

Christine Tasin, a founder of the "Secular Response" organization, was hauled before a court in 2013 and convicted of making "statements likely to provoke rejection of Muslims" following a public argument. The court fined her EURO 3,000, but her conviction was later overturned on appeal.

Other members of the same organization have been fined for voicing their concerns about Islamism, while a writer was convicted of "incitement to racial discrimination" for comments about the backgrounds of drug dealers. The Minister of the Interior even called for street demonstrations against him. "Secular Response" was forced to relocate to Switzerland.

While a wide range of speech has been suppressed, in the name of secularism (*laïcité*) France has also infringed on religious freedom. Thus, while subjecting critics of Islam to harsh penalties, the government has made it illegal for Muslim girls to wear veils in public schools, and for women to wear burqas, an obvious violation of the freedom of religion. Using astonishingly weak arguments, the European Court of Human Rights upheld the bans. The judgment has deeply alienated Muslims throughout the world, suggesting profound hypocrisy about the European commitment to human rights and the freedom of religion. Yet the ruling has been met with virtually no public criticism, other than from the Muslim community, and only a few [critiques](#) by human rights organizations.

The French state has also compromised the freedom of numerous other religious groups, who have been demonized by government leaders, blacklisted and subjected to harassment by bogus official monitoring bodies. No court prosecutes, and few public intellectuals condemn, scurrilous media attacks on minority religions called "sects."

France has been a primary inspiration for human rights principles since the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Yet it is clear that France is now in a political and moral corner in regards to human rights as a result of contradictions and double standards in its approach toward fundamental freedoms.

The struggle against Islamic terrorism is a struggle against a form of totalitarianism. No society can successfully withstand such a challenge without itself respecting *intellectual* diversity and freedom. If France would recommit itself to fundamental freedoms, and rid itself of secularized blasphemy laws and discriminatory laws like the burqa ban, authorities would be on firmer ground to insist on the sanctity of individual freedom and to uphold the rule of law (for example, to regain control of Islamist-controlled urban regions). Resistance to Islamist totalitarianism would be a clearer struggle if the state were not also in the business of stifling free speech and enforcing cultural conformity.

Aaron Rhodes is President of the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe and a founder of the Freedom Rights Project. He was Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights 1993-2007.

Statement of Human Rights Without Frontiers concerning the attacks on the offices of Charlie Hebdo on 7th January 2015

HRWF (08.01.2015) - France mourns today. And all lovers of democracy mourn with her. The global outpourings of support and solidarity with the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings in Paris demonstrate just how precious the freedom of speech, thought and opinion is to all of us. It is a fundamental right that we dare not compromise, even in the face of senseless violence of this sort.

Human Rights Without Frontiers expresses its deep sadness and outrage over this attack. There can be no justification, religious or otherwise, for such a barbaric act. It is significant that among the earliest voices to condemn the attack were Arab nations and Muslim leaders. In a time when anti-Muslim sentiment runs high in Europe, we must be careful to distinguish the religion of millions of peaceful law-abiding citizens from the criminal actions of violent extremists, which have no place in democratic societies.

Charlie Hebdo satirizes Muslims, Christians, Jews and people of all sorts. The art of satire has long been an important medium for the free expression of ideas throughout the world. It is often humorous, outrageous and even offensive at times. It is a method that has been employed by journalists, poets, writers and prophets of ancient times. To censor these voices, however unpleasant they may be to the hearers, is an affront to democracy. It is in times such as these that 'We Are All Charlie' or our humanity is diminished.

Sharpening contradictions: Why al-Qaeda attacked Satirists in Paris

Informed COMMENT (08.01.2015) <http://www.juancole.com/2015/01/sharpening-contradictions-satirists.html> - The horrific murder of the editor, cartoonists and other staff of the irreverent satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*, along with two policemen, by terrorists in Paris was in my view a strategic strike, aiming at polarizing the French and European public.

The problem for a terrorist group like al-Qaeda is that its recruitment pool is Muslims, but most Muslims are not interested in terrorism. Most Muslims are not even interested in politics, much less political Islam. France is a country of 66 million, of which about 5 million is of Muslim heritage. But in polling, only a third, less than 2 million, say that they are interested in religion. French Muslims may be the most secular Muslim-heritage population in the world (ex-Soviet ethnic Muslims often also have low rates of belief and observance). Many Muslim immigrants in the post-war period to France came as laborers and were not literate people, and their grandchildren are rather distant from Middle Eastern fundamentalism, pursuing urban cosmopolitan culture such as rap and rai. In Paris, where Muslims tend to be better educated and more religious, [the vast majority reject violence and say they are loyal to France](#).

Al-Qaeda wants to mentally colonize French Muslims, but faces a wall of disinterest. But if it can get non-Muslim French to be beastly to ethnic Muslims on the grounds that they are Muslims, it can start creating a common political identity around grievance against discrimination.

This tactic is similar to the one used by Stalinists in the early 20th century. Decades ago I read an account by the philosopher Karl Popper of how he flirted with Marxism for about 6 months in 1919 when he was auditing classes at the University of Vienna. He left the group in disgust when he discovered that they were attempting to use false flag operations to provoke militant confrontations. In one of them police killed 8 socialist youth at Hörlgasse on 15 June 1919. For the unscrupulous among Bolsheviks—who would later be Stalinists—the fact that most students and workers don't want to overthrow the business class is inconvenient, and so it seemed desirable to some of them to "sharpen the contradictions" between labor and capital.

The operatives who carried out this attack exhibit signs of professional training. They spoke unaccented French, and so certainly know that they are playing into the hands of Marine LePen and the Islamophobic French Right wing. They may have been French, but they appear to have been battle hardened. This horrific murder was not a pious protest against the defamation of a religious icon. It was an attempt to provoke European society into pogroms against French Muslims, at which point al-Qaeda recruitment would suddenly exhibit some successes instead of faltering in the face of lively Beur youth culture (French Arabs playfully call themselves by this anagram). Ironically, there are reports that one of the two policemen they killed was a Muslim.

Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, then led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, deployed this sort of polarization strategy successfully in Iraq, constantly attacking Shiites and their holy symbols, and provoking the ethnic cleansing of a million Sunnis from Baghdad. The polarization proceeded, with the help of various incarnations of Daesh (Arabic for ISIL or ISIS, which descends from al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia). And in the end, the brutal and genocidal strategy worked, such that Daesh was able to encompass all of Sunni Arab Iraq, which had suffered so many Shiite reprisals that they sought the umbrella of the very group that had deliberately and systematically provoked the Shiites.

"Sharpening the contradictions" is the strategy of sociopaths and totalitarians, aimed at unmooring people from their ordinary insouciance and preying on them, mobilizing their energies and wealth for the perverted purposes of a self-styled great leader.

The only effective response to this manipulative strategy (as Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani tried to tell the Iraqi Shiites a decade ago) is to resist the impulse to blame an entire group for the actions of a few and to refuse to carry out identity-politics reprisals.

For those who require unrelated people to take responsibility for those who claim to be their co-religionists (not a demand ever made of Christians), the al-Azhar Seminary, seat of Sunni Muslim learning and fatwas, [condemned the attack, as did the Arab League](#) that comprises 22 Muslim-majority states.

We have a model for response to terrorist provocation and attempts at sharpening the contradictions. It is Norway after [Anders Behring Breivik](#) committed mass murder of [Norwegian leftists](#) for being soft on Islam. The Norwegian government launched no war on terror. They tried Breivik in court as a common criminal. They remained committed to their admirable modern Norwegian values.

Most of France will also remain committed to French values of the Rights of Man, which they invented. But an insular and hateful minority will take advantage of this deliberately polarizing atrocity to push their own agenda. Europe's future depends on whether the Marine LePens are allowed to become mainstream. Extremism thrives on other people's extremism, and is inexorably defeated by tolerance.

Let me conclude by offering my profound condolences to the families, friends and fans of our murdered colleagues at Charlie Hebdo, including Stephane Charbonnier, Bernard Maris, and cartoonists Georges Wolinski Jean Cabut, aka Cabu, and Berbard Verlhac (Tignous)- and all the others. As Charbonnier, known as Charb, said, "I prefer to die standing than to live on my knees."

'Anti-white' racism trial begins in France

In a case being backed by a leading anti-racism group, a trial began in France on Friday in which the defendant stands accused of a racially-motivated attack on a white man in a Paris metro station.

France 24 (26.04.2013) - The trial of a 29-year-old accused of a racially motivated attack on a white man in a Paris metro station began at a court house in the French capital on Friday, in a legal case being backed by a leading [anti-racism](#) group.

According to the prosecution, the accused man assaulted the victim after first using a string of [racial slurs](#) - including "sale Français" (dirty Frenchman) and "sale blanc" (dirty white).

It is also alleged that he used a broken bottle as a weapon during the attack, which took place in 2010.

While this is not the first accusation of incidents of so-called 'anti-white' racism in France, this latest case is the first to have been backed by leading anti-racism group, The international league against racism and anti-Semitism ([Licra](#)), which is supporting the prosecution.

"Insulted because he was white"

In an interview with French radio station RFI, Licra vice-president Philippe Schmidt said he believes there was clearly a racial dimension to the attack. "He was insulted because he was white," said Schmidt.

Although only one suspect is standing trial, there were reportedly several others involved in the assault.

"They came after him because of the colour of his skin," Schmidt commented. "The guy is white, the guy is French, and that's why they came after him."

The notion of whites as the victims of racist abuse is not new in France, but remains highly controversial.

In 2012, [Jean-Francois Copé](#), now the head of France's right wing political party the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) but then its general secretary, sparked outrage and a nation-wide debate when he published a book in which he claimed anti-white racism is a growing problem in French towns.

"This racism is as unacceptable as every other form of [racism](#) - we must denounce it as we condemn all other forms of discrimination," he wrote.

Copé's comments drew unfavourable comparisons with the far right Front National, led by Marine Le Pen.

Licra and far right?

However, Schmidt insists Licra's involvement in the trial does not equate to support of far right views.

"At the end of the road they [the far right] want the same thing, but not for the same reason," he told RFI.

"They have a very archaic and extremist view of society. They think it should be French, white and Catholic. That's not the way I see the world."

Meanwhile, the defendant in the Paris court case admits to being present at the scene of the attack, but denies allegations of racism, saying that he became involved in the altercation only to protect a friend.

Should he be found guilty, he could face a €75,000 fine as well as up to five years in prison.

The trial continues.
