

Extremist Violence in France: A Threat to the Human Rights of All

Last night terrorist attacks in France killed 127 individuals and wounded hundreds more. For over a year Human Rights First has researched violent extremism and antisemitism in France, and is saddened that these trends have erupted into horrific violence.

The November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris come less than a year after the murderous attack at a kosher grocery in Paris and the deadly Charlie Hebdo headquarters shootings. Each of these tragedies has drawn long-overdue attention to the resurgence of antisemitism and extremism in Europe and, unfortunately, it is tragedy that brings priorities into focus.

U.S. SHOULD LEAD ON COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND EXTREMISM

Building on our many years of experience, Human Rights First is launching a report on antisemitism in France to urge the U.S. government to make combating the rise of antisemitism a foreign policy priority. While the result will be a concrete plan of action focused on and with France, it will also hold lessons for other European governments.

Human Rights First has worked to promote U.S. leadership to combat antisemitic and other forms of hate crime in Europe for over a decade. We have advanced a comprehensive approach that combats hate crimes and addresses root causes while protecting free speech.

We view antisemitism as a grave threat to human rights. Antisemitic violence prevents Jews from exercising their fundamental freedoms. History shows that antisemitism is also a harbinger of broader societal dysfunction.

At Human Rights First, we are pressing the U.S. government to combat antisemitism with the urgency the problem demands. We are the only major international human rights organization focusing on this issue.

FRANCE EVENTS EXPOSE DEPTH OF CRISIS

Alarmed by recent developments in France, we are preparing a detailed analysis of the situation. The report

will analyze the nature and extent of antisemitism in France. It is based on public information and interviews conducted with a broad range of government officials, civil society representatives, religious leaders, and academic experts. It will also detail how antisemitism fits into broader phenomena, including the difficult situation facing the French Muslim population and a resurgent far-right National Front.

Violence against the French Jewish community is rising, and thousands of Jews are choosing to leave the continent, fearful for their lives. Alarming, over 7,000 French Jews left for Israel over the past year, more than double the number who left the year before.

U.S., FRANCE COOPERATION REQUIRED TO ADDRESS THIS CRISIS

The United States and France share a strong interest in combating this serious human rights problem and working towards more tolerant, inclusive solutions. Those shared interests and the severity of the problem justifies a joint U.S.–French plan of action and a broader coalition of civil society representatives from both countries. Upcoming French elections in 2017, with the rise of the far right parties seen as contributing to antisemitism, and the current refugee crisis sweeping the European Union make the need to confront these issues all the more urgent.

To advance this coalitional work through the drafting of the report itself, we have held a roundtable discussion in Washington, hosted by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, to present our draft findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Stakeholders shared insights about the utility of our research and the prospects for future action. We will be holding a similar roundtable event in late November at the Shoah Memorial in Paris.

In January 2016, on the anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo and kosher supermarket attacks, we plan to hold a public launch event for the report to urge the U.S. government to work with France on solutions to prevent future attacks – and to share our ideas on a path forward.