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Western Europe: Amnesty International condemns attacks on Jews and Arabs

Amnesty International strongly condemns the wave of racist and anti-Semitic attacks in Western Europe against Arabs and Jews prompted by intolerance of religious, racial, cultural, and national differences.

"During the month of April, in particular, we saw a sharp increase in anti-Semitic attacks in Europe. We oppose such racist and anti-Semitic attacks unconditionally," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"As the UN World Conference on Racism demonstrated, racism and intolerance must be challenged in all their forms. We welcome the recent statements made by the EU condemning the attacks and urge European governments to take concerted action to combat racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia," Khan added.

The recent increase in anti-Semitic attacks has unfolded in the wake of the Middle East crisis. They follow a general rise in racist and xenophobic violence in Western Europe, particularly against Arabs and certain ethnic and religious minorities, which rose sharply in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks in the United States. The international human rights organisation condemns these attacks, which have included verbal abuse, physical assaults and attacks on mosques -- and express alarm that they continue.

The anti-Semitic violence has included the posting of threatening hate mail, vandalising of synagogues and cemeteries, and verbal abuse and physical assaults on Jews in a number of West European countries including France, Belgium, Germany and the UK.

In France several synagogues, in Lyon, Montpellier, Garges-les-Gonesses (Val d'Oise) and Strasbourg were vandalized in March and April, while the synagogue in Marseille was burned to the ground.

Last month in Berlin, a young Jewish woman was reportedly attacked in the underground rail system because she was wearing a pendant of a Star of David.

Amnesty International has monitored racist and xenophobic violence in Western Europe, including against Arabs and Muslims in the wake of the 11 September attacks in the United States. In an attack in Brussels on 7 May, a Moroccan immigrant couple was shot dead and two of their children wounded by an elderly Belgian neighbour, reportedly expressing racist views.

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"West European governments must redouble their efforts to combat racism and to bring to justice suspected perpetrators of hate crimes," Irene Khan stressed.

Background

In France, hostility toward Jews has led to a particularly serious wave of attacks. The French police recorded 395 anti-Semitic incidents between 29 March and 17 April. Between 1 January and 2 April, 34 "serious anti-Semitic actions" were recorded, referring to attacks on Jewish persons or property, including synagogues and cemeteries.

In the UK, at least 48 attacks on Jews were reported in April, compared with 12 in March and seven in February. Some of the assaults resulted in the hospitalisation of victims with serious injuries. Reportedly, the victims were mainly orthodox and Hassidic Jews. In the April attack on a London synagogue, a swastika was scrawled on the lectern.

In Belgium, synagogues in Brussels, and Antwerp were firebombed in April; the facade of a synagogue in Charleroi, Southwest Belgium, was sprayed with bullets. A Jewish bookshop and delicatessen in Brussels were destroyed by fire. Criminal investigations have been opened into these incidents, as well as into a physical assault on the Chief Rabbi of Brussels in December 2001.

In April, synagogues were attacked in Berlin and Herford in Germany. In the same month two Orthodox Jews were attacked and slightly injured by a group of people on a shopping street in Berlin after visiting a synagogue.

For further information see the joint statement by Amnesty International and Human Right Watch on www.amnesty.org.

Public Document

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