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Corsica (France): Perpetrators of new wave of racist violence must be brought promptly to justice

The French authorities must make it their priority to bring the perpetrators of racist attacks promptly to justice, Amnesty International said today. The organization is concerned for the rights of immigrants and those of immigrant origin in Corsica after a disturbing series of acts of racist violence.

On the night of 27 November 2004, the house of a Moroccan imam at Sartène (Corse-du-Sud), which includes a prayer room, was attacked by a group of armed men who opened fire on the door of the house, after knocking on it. Imam Mohammed al-Akrach came to the door and upon hearing racist insults did not open it. The men then reportedly fired five to six shots into the door. The imam was not injured. The attack, which is under judicial investigation, follows an attack a year ago on the same house when the entrance was splashed with inflammable liquid and set on fire. Last week there was a racist attack on a family of Tunisian origin living in Calvi, when shots were fired and Molotov cocktails thrown at the house where a woman and four children were living. Racist graffiti were reportedly left at the scene.

"The identity of the perpetrators of the most recent attack is not yet known. However, Corsican nationalists or autonomists, some of whom have claimed responsibility for previous racist attacks, have a particular responsibility to be firm and consistent in their condemnation of such attacks, irrespective of the identity or aims of the perpetrators," Amnesty International said.

In September 2004, Amnesty International expressed its concern that human rights groups and defenders were being subjected to threats and intimidation after reports of numerous acts of violent racial hatred, directed in particular at the North African community. This new wave of attacks is the last of several to have been reported in the island's recent history. The acts of violence include bomb attacks on houses, offices and vehicles. According to reports, some members of the Moroccan community have felt under such threat that they have left, while others are planning to leave the island.

Background

The number of racist attacks in Corsica has shown a steady increase over recent years. The attacks have risen to over 56 since September 2003, with over 30 taking place in 2004. In 2002 racist attacks on the island were reported to be the "worst for ten years" and three times as high as in 2001, according to figures supplied by the Ministry of the Interior and based on those compiled by the national human rights consultative body, the *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme* (CNCDH). According to these figures, 62 per cent of violent attacks in Corsica were aimed at North Africans. Corsica is the French region with the highest immigrant population after the Ile-de-France.

On 17 September 2004, a demonstration was held in Corte (Haute-Corse) by a number of individuals and organizations, including Amnesty International, to protest against a pattern of serious attacks on individuals of non-Corsican origin, or properties belonging to members of the immigrant community. In September 2004, the numerous acts of violent racial hatred, directed in particular at the Moroccan community, were attributed to a constellation of small armed groups with nationalist aims. Human rights organizations were also targeted. A small armed group called *Clandestini Corsi* issued a statement in which it congratulated the "anonymous underground movement" for its attack on the home of a North African in Biguglia. It also threatened the anti-racist group *Ave Basta*, and the human rights group, the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH), for declarations they had made condemning the attacks in Corsican newspapers.

Public Document

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