

African Demonstrations Take Place Opposing Charlie Hebdo Cartoon

Repressive response to Paris killings prompts responses internationally

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

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Protests throughout the Muslim world gained last this week after the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo again highlighted a cartoon on its cover depicting the Islamic religion with disdain.

This publication's offices were attacked by two alleged suspects of Algerian descent, Cherif and Said Kouachi, who had lived their lives in the impoverished suburbs outside of Paris. In the response to the deaths of twelve staff members, security personnel and police on Jan. 7, the French government under Francois Hollande has intensified its repressive apparatus largely targeting the African, Middle Eastern and Muslim communities in France.

Dozens of Muslims have been arrested by the police and intelligence services attempting to link them with the two brothers and another French citizen of West African origin, Amedy Coulibaly, who was killed when police stormed a supermarket in Paris on Jan. 9. Four other people died in the hostage-taking episode that was linked to the simultaneous actions that resulted in the police killing of the Kouachi brothers at a printing factory in Dammartin-en-Goele.

Another woman of Algerian descent, Hayat Boumeddiene, was reported to have been a major suspect in the shootings. However, she had left France as early as Jan. 2, five days prior to the Charlie Hebdo attack.

The official French position along with their western allies in Europe and North America is that the so-called "ideology of radical Islam" is the central problem fomenting such terrorist attacks. There has been very little discussion in the corporate media about the overall social conditions facing Africans, Arabs and Muslims in France as well as the continent in general.

African Muslims Demonstrate Across Region

In Africa demonstrations have taken place in Algeria, Senegal, Sudan, Mauritania and in Niger, the most violent, where a French cultural center was attacked on Jan. 16. All of these states have large Muslim populations and many people within them viewed the latest Charlie Hebdo magazine as an affront to their religious beliefs.

These demonstrations in African states are coinciding with similar manifestations in Yemen, Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan and other countries. In many of these demonstrations people have gathered outside the French embassies often coming into conflict with police.

According to a Voice of America (VOA) report, "In Algiers, Algeria, police clashed with

demonstrators who threw rocks and bottles around the waterfront area of the capital. Hundreds of people had earlier marched peacefully through the capital, waving placards saying 'I am Muhammad'."

This same article goes on to note that "Largely peaceful marches took place in the capitals of West African countries Mali, Senegal and Mauritania."

Nonetheless, in Niger, demonstrations turned violent when crowds clashed with security forces. Several reports indicate that Christian churches were targeted in the attacks.

After three days of demonstrations during Jan. 16-18, at least ten people were killed. In the second largest city in Niger, Zinder, a French cultural center was damaged during protests.

In addition, other demonstrations were reported in regional cities, such as Maradi, 600 km east of Niamey the capital, where the two churches were struck by arson. Another church and a residence of the foreign minister were said to have been torched in the eastern town of Goure.

Niger has a population of 17 million people most of whom are Muslims. Despite this the central government says that it is a secular state.

A former French colony, the country is rich with mineral resources, mainly uranium. The uranium mines are largely controlled by AREVA, a firm based in Paris.

Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou told the country in a television address on Jan. 17 that "Those who pillage religious sites and profane them, those who persecute and kill their Christian compatriots or foreigners who live on our soil, have understood nothing of Islam."

Nevertheless, the president added that he understood the anger of Muslims who feel aggrieved by the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad and that "freedom of expression should not mean liberty to insult religious beliefs."

Niger has United States and French military contingents stationed on long term missions. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) is operating a drone station inside the country.

The French and the U.S. are using Niger to carry out a counter-insurgency war against what these imperialist states describe as terrorist groups that have established bases in northern Mali. The military presence of Washington and Paris are in no way benefitting the masses of working people, farmers and youth inside Niger.

France Distorts Meaning of Freedom of Expression, Liberty

France, a longtime colonial and neo-colonial power in Africa, is upholding the right of publications to insult oppressed groups within the country amid ongoing policies of discrimination and oppression against people whose ancestry is rooted in Africa and the Middle East.

The domestic racism in France is a direct outgrowth of imperialist policies of slavery, colonialism and imperialism in operation since the 18th century. Due to the legacy of post-colonial French domination and exploitation of its former colonies, societal development has been stifled creating the conditions for the large-scale migration of African people.

At the same time, the overall economic conditions in France itself are by no means good. Unemployment has hovered over ten percent for many years and successive regimes have failed to bring down the high rates of joblessness and poverty.

Consequently, the character of immigration policy, the existence of racism, anti-Islamic bigotry, and the failure of integration or assimilation, cannot be overlooked when analyzing the current social crisis in France. This is coupled with the disastrous foreign policy of Paris which has provided material and political support to the rebels fighting against the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

The French government is well aware of the recruitment of its own citizens to serve in the rebel groups that it claims to oppose in both Iraq and Syria. In fact Hollande has said that his government has supplied Syrian rebels with arms to fight a secular government.

These policies in the Iraq and Syria are compounded by the French interventions in African states over the last few years in Gabon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Ivory Coast, Niger, Mali, Chad, Somalia, Djibouti and other states. Despite its proclaimed altruistic motivations in Africa, the result of this unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of these countries has caused further instability and economic stagnation.

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Azikiwe](#)

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