

French Police Question 8-Year-Old on Suspicion of “Defending Terrorism”

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France is in a state of “collective hysteria,” says Sefen Guez Guez, the lawyer for a second grader questioned by police in France. (via [BFMTV](#))

Just when it seemed that the crackdown on free speech in France could not get worse, French police today questioned a second grader on suspicion of “defending terrorism.”

BFMTV [says](#) that administrators at a primary school in Nice reported the child to police on 21 January after the boy allegedly said that he “felt he was on the side of the terrorists.”

“A police station is absolutely no place for an eight-year-old child,” the boy’s lawyer Sefen Guez Guez told BFMTV. He said that the incident showed that France was going through a state of “collective hysteria.”

Guez Guez said that on 8 January, the day after two French gunmen attacked the offices of the magazine [Charlie Hebdo](#), the boy, whose name has been reported as Ahmed, was in class when he was asked if he was “Charlie.”

“He answered, ‘I am on the side of the terrorists, because I am against the caricatures of the prophet,’” the lawyer said.

Since the murders of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists and the lethal attack by a third French gunman on a Jewish supermarket, French government officials and media have adopted the slogan “Je Suis Charlie” – I am Charlie – to indicate social conformity and support for official policies, all under the guise of supporting free speech.

The Collective Against Islamophobia in France, which has taken up Ahmed’s case, [provided these additional details](#): “On 8 January, Ahmed, a second grader, was called on by his teacher who asked him if he was Charlie. Being of Muslim religion and aged only eight, he opposed *Charlie Hebdo* because of the caricatures of the prophet, and responded naively that he was on the side of the terrorists. Angered, the teacher sent him to the principal, who was in the class next door, and who asked him three times in front of the whole class, ‘Are you Charlie?’”

The child’s parents were called in and “played an educational role, explaining to him what terrorism really was and why one should be on the side of the *Charlie Hebdo* victims,” Guez Guez said.

Principal calls police

Instead of leaving the matter there, on 21 January, the school principal lodged two complaints with police, one against the child for “defending terrorism,” and another against the child’s father for trespassing.

According to the lawyer, the child had been deeply upset and isolated after what happened, so his father accompanied him to the school playground on three occasions after 8 January, before being told he was not allowed to do so.

Fabienne Lewandowski, a spokesperson for the Alpes-Maritimes regional police, confirmed to BFMTV that they received the complaints. Lewandowski revealed that the school principal claimed that the child had said “French people should be killed,” “I am on the side of the terrorists” and “the journalists deserved to die.” The child then allegedly refused to take part in a government-decreed minute of silence.

“During our interview, the child indicated that he had said some of these words, but did not really understand what they meant,” the police spokesperson said. “The purpose of this interview was to understand exactly what had happened, and what could have led him to say this.”

“We can regret that this took the form of an official police interview,” Lewandowski said, “but under the circumstances, we could have gone even further.”

According to the police spokesperson, the father “showed regret for his son’s words.”

The Collective Against Islamophobia in France [said](#) that his interview by police “was an additional trauma that illustrates the collective hysteria that has ensued since the beginning of January.”

Prosecutors in Nice have yet to decide how to proceed in the case.

Victim of bullying?

Ahmed has said that he was a victim of bullying by the school principal, according to his lawyer, BFMTV reported. On one occasion, the child was playing in a sandbox. According to the child’s account relayed by the lawyer, the principal told the boy, “stop digging in the sand, you won’t find a machine-gun in there.”

On another occasion, Ahmed, who is diabetic, alleges the principal deprived him of his insulin, saying, “Since you want us all to die, you will taste death.” The principal has denied the accusation.

Guez Guez said that Ahmed’s parents planned to lodge a complaint about the school’s behavior.

[According to Le Figaro](#), the French education ministry confirmed that the school principal had also made a report about Ahmed to child protective services.

Government crackdown

While Ahmed’s case may seem extreme, the complaint against him is enabled by an

atmosphere of intolerance and authoritarianism fostered by the French government.

Since the attacks in Paris, the government has launched an unprecedented crackdown,[condemned by Amnesty International](#) as well as French civil rights groups, in which it has jailed dozens of people for things they have said, under the vague charge of “defending terrorism.”

Previously, as The Electronic Intifada [reported](#), one of those arrested was a sixteen-year-old high schooler, for allegedly posting a caricature mocking *Charlie Hebdo*.

Yesterday, French President [François Hollande](#) used an International Holocaust Memorial Day speech to confirm that his government plans to [tighten its control over what people are allowed to say online and stiffen penalties for illegal speech](#).

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