



Council on American-Islamic Relations
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Ms. Gayle Manchin
Chair
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
732 N. Capitol Street, N.W., Suite A714
Washington, D.C. 20401

CC: United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback

Sent Via Email

RE: CAIR Request for USCIRF to Investigate French Government's Crackdown on Muslims, Consider Recommending France Be Listed Among Countries of Particular Concern, Placed on Special Watch List

Dear Chair Manchin:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I am writing to request that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) investigate the French government's longstanding attempts to restrict freedom of religion, turn anti-Muslim bigotry into official government policy, and collectively punish an entire faith community for the crimes of individual extremists.

Due to such illiberal and irrational anti-religion policies, we also strongly encourage USCIRF to recommend that the U.S. Department of State list France among the Countries of Particular Concern.

The United States is widely respected as an international leader in protecting and upholding religious freedom here and abroad. In recent years, our nation has condemned the persecution of Muslim minorities, including Uyghurs in China, Rohingya in Burma, and Muslims in India. We are now asking the USCIRF to address the anti-Muslim state policies of the government of France.

Modern French Islamophobia can be traced back to its colonial occupation of Muslim countries and lands in the Middle East and Africa, including the conquest of Algeria and subsequent war crimes that took place from 1945 to 1962.

As a response to the December 1991 coup in Algeria that prevented the electoral victory of an Islamic political party and the subsequent civil war in that country, France began to domestically ban Islamic symbols.

Over the past twenty years, France has implemented numerous laws designed to limit and punish the free exercise of religion, especially among Muslims. For example, France has banned students, teachers, and public servants from wearing visible signs of their faith, including hijabs and veils, at school or at work. French law now even forbids religious minorities from exercising their right to wear religious face veils in public. Muslim women in some areas of France have also been fined by police for wearing full-body swimsuits.

Earlier this month, President of France Emmanuel Macron continued this pattern of persecuting French Muslims by launching a public campaign of anti-Islam political rhetoric targeting the community. Macron fanned the flames of anti-Muslim bigotry in France and around the world by claiming, "Islam is a religion that is in crisis all over the world today, we are not just seeing this in our country" and has expressed concern of "Islamic separatism" and called to "liberate" Islam.

Within France, this has led many to rightfully accuse Macron of pandering to far-right extremists and attempting to distract French citizens from his government's dismantling of public services, rising unemployment, poor economy, and ineffective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

More recently, the French government has responded to the horrific murder of teacher Samuel Paty by targeting the French Muslim community at-large instead of only targeting those individuals responsible for the crime. This despite the fact that the crime was strongly condemned by the French Muslim community.

To justify its behavior, the government of France is making sweeping Islamophobic statements about the ways in which French mosques operate and are painting religious leaders and communities as a threat to the secular state.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has alluded to French Muslims as being the "enemy of within" and labeled the Collective Against Islamophobia, a human rights organization created in 2000 whose mission is to combat Islamophobia, as "an enemy of the Republic."

French Prime Minister Jean Castex also said on Monday: "Other actions will follow" against other "networks and individuals who are attacking our basic values and the Republican ideal."

Collectively punishing the French Muslim community for a crime that one French Muslim committed is irrational, illegal, and immoral.

The French government's ongoing efforts to single out the French Muslim community comes with significant consequences. In 2017, the Collective Against Islamophobia in Paris processed 349 cases in which discrimination represented 78% of Islamophobic attacks.

Moreover, on Sunday two French Muslim women of Algerian decent were stabbed in what appears to be a racially and religiously motivated attack in front of the Eiffel Tower.

If Macron and other French officials continue to fuel right-wing populists, French Muslims will continue to experience anti-Muslim hatred and violence in unprecedented numbers.

Should the government of France maintain its laws restricting freedom of religion and continue its path of collectively punishing against French Muslims, the U.S. government should list that country among the Department of State's Countries of Particular Concern and place it on the Special Watch List.

Sincerely,

Nihad Awad
CAIR National Executive Director