

Delegation of France

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MAXIME LEFEBVRE,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OSCE, AT
THE 1038th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 February 2015

Mr. Chairperson,

In response to the comments by my distinguished colleagues from Azerbaijan and Turkey, I should like to make some remarks in a national capacity.

My country experienced horrifying attacks on 7 and 9 January against *Charlie Hebdo* and against a kosher supermarket. These attacks have given rise to widespread indignation and mobilization both in France and abroad. On behalf of France, I should like to say how touched and comforted we have been by this international support. I also want to thank the Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE for helping to adopt on 15 January the joint declaration of the Permanent Council recalling freedom of expression, the condemnation of terrorism and the need to fight intolerance. It was essential to present a united front given the exceptional nature of the situation.

The question that has been raised by Azerbaijan regarding attacks on Muslims in France should be approached from two angles: from the point of view of security and from the point of view of living together and national cohesion.

Security

In the wake of the attacks, the French President and Prime Minister have repeatedly said that “we were facing an elevated threat and we must therefore maintain a very high level of vigilance.”

This is why as part of the Vigipirate Plan, increased to Vigipirate Attack Alert, the Minister of Defence announced on 12 January 2015 the deployment of 10,500 military personnel to sensitive sites.

The Minister of the Interior appointed a co-ordinating prefect for the protection of places of worship across the entire country. He is tasked with ensuring the co-ordination of the deployment and distribution of security personnel mobilized to provide backup around all places of worship, schools, cultural and symbolic sites, and any potential adjustments in response to changes in needs.

As regards the events of 8 January 2015 in Le Mans directed against the mosque in the Sablons neighbourhood, the criminal investigation was quickly able to take in for questioning a 69-year-old man who admitted to the acts he was accused of. The case is therefore solved. The person in question is currently in custody and the court's verdict will be announced on 18 February.

Police intervened to dismantle jihadist networks in the Paris and Lyon region, but did not enter any mosques.

Living together and national cohesion

In his address on 15 January 2015 to the Arab World Institute in Paris, President François Hollande said that Muslims are the world's "first victims of fanaticism, fundamentalism and intolerance." Radical Islamism, which affects Muslims first, "has fed on all the contradictions, influences, poverty, inequalities and conflicts that have been unresolved for too long", the Head of State said. "We are united in the face of terrorism. We must also remember that Islam is compatible with democracy and we should reject any generalizations and confusion [about this]. French Muslims have the same rights, the same duties, as all citizens. They must be protected."

The Head of State was also keen to assure all associations of the government's determination to combat all racist acts, including anti-Muslim ones, which constitute intolerable attacks on the unity of the French Republic. "France is a country that has rules, principles and values, and among those values there is one that is not negotiable, that will never be, and that is freedom and democracy."

France is fully available to work within the OSCE to combat intolerance, radicalization and discrimination. This will be the topic of the Security Day in May organized by the Secretary General, to which my country will be happy to contribute.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, I should like to emphasize the complete determination of the French authorities to ensure religious freedom, to guarantee the security of all French citizens and to promote national cohesion within the framework of the values of the Republic.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.