

French government announces mass closure of mosques in continuing anti-Muslim crackdown

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In the latest step of the extreme-right anti-Muslim campaign by the Macron government in France, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin announced on Wednesday that dozens of mosques are to be forcibly closed or investigated.

Darmanin tweeted that “as per my instructions, the state services will be launching a massive and unprecedented action against separatism.” He added that “76 mosques suspected of separatism will be investigated in the coming days and those which must be closed, will be.”

The action had already been outlined in an interior ministry document dated November 27, which was leaked to the right-wing daily *Le Figaro*. The newspaper reported that of the 76 mosques, 18 will face “immediate action,” i.e., closure, and that another 58 would be investigated by the end of the year. It noted that the national intelligence services had conducted a review of 2,623 mosques across the country.

Speaking to *Le Figaro*, Darmanin stated that “ever since taking on my post at [the interior ministry], I have asked that we change classifications to be able to identify the separatist centers that have declared war on the Republic.” He added that “up until now, the government has been interested in radicalization and terrorism. Now, we will also attack the terrain of terrorism, where can be found those people who create the intellectual and cultural space to secede and impose their values.”

Darmanin’s statement amounts to a blunt declaration that the government’s target is not terrorism but is directed against the Muslim population. His reference to “people who create the intellectual and cultural space to secede” is defined so vaguely and sweepingly as to

encompass every Muslim church and cultural association in the country.

The Macron government is using the attack on Muslims to build up a fascistic police state. Its policy is aimed at whipping up a pogromist atmosphere to strengthen the far-right and justify far-reaching attacks on the democratic rights of the entire population. This is under conditions of mass left-wing demonstrations of hundreds of thousands last Saturday in opposition to police violence and the government’s attempt to criminalize the filming of police violence.

More than 70 mosques have been closed since the beginning of the year. The campaign has been intensified in the wake of the terrorist killing of Samuel Paty on October 15.

Following the attack, Darmanin conducted a tour of television and radio shows, declaring that he was personally “shocked” when he saw supermarket aisles with international—i.e., kosher and halal—foods, and stating that the mere presence of such food aisles led inexorably toward “separatism” and terrorism.

At the same time, Darmanin had announced the closure of the Pantin mosque in Northern Paris, which regularly served around 2,000 Muslims, on the sole grounds that its Facebook page had shared a video prior to the attack criticizing Paty for having shown students in his class an anti-Muslim caricature by *Charlie Hebdo*. Following the attack, the mosque had immediately pulled down the video and denounced Paty’s murder.

The government has also ordered the dissolution of 52 Muslim associations, including legal rights advocacy groups, charities and other cultural organizations. This includes the Collective Against

Islamophobia in France (CCIF), one of the largest Muslim charities in the country, which primarily offers legal aid to Muslims in discrimination cases. On November 27, it published its “final statement” pronouncing its self-dissolution according to government orders, and shortly thereafter removed its website and social media accounts.

Barakacity, another charity, was also dissolved, and police conducted a violent night-time raid against its president, Idriss Sihamedi.

In the latest announcement, the 76 mosques targeted will supposedly be closed if they have hosted an imam suspected of promoting Islamic terrorism, have violated rules for receiving public funds, have spaces or rooms inside the facility that are not registered with the state, or if they are already subject to a request for the dissolution of an association. The wide scope provides a multitude of possible charges to justify mass closures.

This has been timed to coincide with the government’s efforts to pass its “anti-separatism law,” which will be introduced into the National Assembly on December 9. Cynically renamed the law “confirming republican principles,” it is to be introduced as a bill on the 115th anniversary of the 1905 secularism law. In fact, Macron’s law is a repudiation of the 1905 law and the most basic democratic rights defended and advanced in the French Revolution, including freedom of expression and association, as well as the separation of church and state.

It will force Muslim institutions and imams to sign a humiliating “secular charter,” agreeing that all future imams will be trained with the oversight of the French state; patients who refuse to be examined by a doctor of the opposite sex will be fined up to 75,000 euros; and French school-aged children will be required to register with an identification number to ensure their attendance at school. The last measure, to illegalize home-schooling, was deemed unconstitutional by the Council of State on December 3.

The response of the majority of French and international media to the latest anti-Muslim measures has been either silence or support. One can only imagine the response of *Le Monde* and other publications had mass closures of mosques and anti-Muslim measures been imposed against the Muslim minority of Russia or China.

Macron and Darmanin have repeatedly declared that that a “war” is being waged against the Republic. Macron stated that “Islam is a religion that is in a crisis all over the world today,” “we must save our children from the clutches of the Islamists.” The government’s declarations, implying the existence of a country-wide Islamic conspiracy to form a break away Muslim theocracy in France, were once restricted to the ramblings of the extreme right. They have been adopted wholesale by the French state.

The government’s actions are aimed at promoting the far-right and anti-Muslim hysteria. In a report published earlier this year, the CCIF found that 789 Islamophobic incidences took place in 2019, up from 446 in 2017.

These developments confirm the warnings of the Socialist Equality Party (France) prior to the 2017 election, that Macron offered no alternative to oppose the neo-fascist policies of Marine Le Pen.

With thousands dying every week as a result of the government’s *de facto* herd immunity policy and unprecedented levels of social inequality, the French ruling class is preparing for an explosion of social opposition. Its promotion of fascist forces and its building up of police powers will be directed against the entire working class.



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