

Rights Groups: Muslims 'Unjustly Placed on Blacklists' Across Europe



Demonstrators protesting against Islamophobia in France

BRUSSELS (Middle East Eye) – Muslim civil society groups from Europe warned of the growing level of Islamophobia spreading across the continent at a major security and human rights conference in Poland.

Seven Muslim groups from Austria, France, Sweden, Spain, and the Netherlands spoke out against the climate of “state-sponsored” Islamophobia facing them in their countries.

Each organization had three minutes to address the session, with representatives from Austria and France also in the room.

Their address to the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Human Dimen-

sion Conference in Warsaw came days after Polish authorities banned Cage’s international director, Muhammad Rabbani, from entering Poland after his name appeared on the Schengen Information System, which lets any Schengen member-state place an individual on a no-entry list to the Schengen zone.

This year, OSCE is chaired by North Macedonia’s Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani, with the Human Dimension Conference in Warsaw lasting ten days and expected to end on 13th October.

Adani el-Kanfoudi, spokesperson for Muslim Rights Watch in the Netherlands, told the OSCE conference that he was due to meet Rabba-

ni alongside other European Muslim civil society groups.

“This incident, among many others, is a perfect example of a broader pattern, where key figures from the Muslim community are unjustly placed on blacklists,” said Kanfoudi.

“We are facing a distressing reality where Muslims are systematically targeted, a blatant violation of their constitutional rights. This discriminatory practice not only infringes upon individual liberties but also instills fear and division within our communities.”

Commenting on his own country’s situation, Kanfoudi spoke of the hundreds of Dutch Muslims who approached his organization and said they had been wrongly placed on the terror list by the Dutch authorities, leading some to lose their livelihoods, face banking and travel restrictions and being treated like “second class citizens.”

Arman Jeziz, who represents In-san, began by saying that a mosque had been burned down in Sweden as he was writing his speech.

“If books and mosques are being burnt, if Muslims are not permitted to dress as they choose, if they are subject to extensive surveillance, if they are frequently portrayed as problematic, and if they are viewed as potentially violent, where do the people in this room believe we are heading?” said Jeziz.

1.2mn Appointment Cancellations Since NHS Strikes, Bill for Walkouts Hits £1.1bn

LONDON (The Daily Mail) – NHS strikes have led to almost 1.2 million appointment cancellations, official figures showed.

In the latest blow to patients, 118,026 hospital appointments in England were rescheduled due to a three-day walkout by British Medical Association (BMA) consultants and junior doctors earlier this week. Radiographers also joined the picket lines on Tuesday.

A further 4,415 appointments in mental health, learning disability and community settings were estimated to have been also cancelled, NHS England data revealed.

It means 1,141,089 appointments have been postponed since NHS industrial action — which has involved staff including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and paramedics — kicked-off in December.

NHS board papers released also confirmed the action is estimated to have cost the health service £1.1 billion since December.

But not all NHS trusts have supplied figures on cancelled appointments, meaning the true scale of the disruption is expected to be higher.

NHS leaders have also said the real impact of strikes is masked by the data, as many hospitals have stopped booking in surgeries and other appointments on announced strike days.



As part of the unprecedented walk-out this week, both consultants and junior doctors offered “Christmas Day” levels of staffing, meaning only emergency care is unaffected.

Waiting lists for elective treatment on the NHS currently stand at a record 7.68million — or one in seven people.

This includes almost 390,000 patients who have waited at least one year for treatment.

It is the highest figure since records began in 2007.

For comparison, around 4.4million were stuck in the system when the pandemic reached the UK.

The latest joint strike between both

groups of medics follows their first combined industrial action in September, which led to almost 130,000 NHS inpatient and outpatient appointments being rescheduled.

Responding to the data, Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation said, “As the total number operations and appointments cancelled due to industrial action reaches 1.2 million, which in actuality may be more than twice as high due to trusts not booking activity in the first place, health leaders could be forgiven for wondering at what point will that number become unacceptable enough for the BMA and government to bring an end to this.”

U.S. Senators in China in Bid to Stabilize Relations

SHANGHAI (AFP) – A bipartisan delegation of U.S. lawmakers led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer arrived in China on Saturday, the latest high-level U.S. officials to visit China as Washington seeks to ease tensions with Beijing.

Schumer is set to meet with senior officials in Shanghai before heading to Beijing, where Bloomberg has reported his delegation is seeking a meeting with President Xi Jinping.

The delegation’s plane landed early afternoon in Shanghai, China’s economic powerhouse, where they were greeted by ambassador Nicholas Burns.

Asked about his expectations for the visit, Schumer said he was hoping for “very productive discussions”.

Accompanying Schumer is Republican Senator Mike Crapo, who represents the state of Idaho -- home to chip giant Micron, currently in the crossfire of U.S.-China disputes over semiconductors.

China has said it welcomes the delegation and that it hopes it enhances the lawmakers’ “understanding” of the country.

Beijing’s foreign ministry said the trip would “promote dialogue and exchanges between the legislative bodies of the two countries, and inject positive elements into the development of China-U.S. relations”.

U.S. media reported the group will seek to raise issues ranging from the climate for U.S. businesses in China to human rights.

The delegation will also stop off in South Korea and Japan, The New York Times reported, citing the senators’ offices.

It is the latest in a series of visits by U.S. officials to China, as both sides seek to defuse tensions across a range of security and economic issues that have been at their highest levels in years.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury and Commerce Secretaries Janet Yellen and Gina Raimondo, as well as Climate Envoy John Kerry, have all visited China this year.

And President Joe Biden Friday said he may meet Xi in San Francisco in November as Washington and Beijing push to reset ties, but added that nothing is scheduled yet.

Biden is set to host leaders from across the region on November 16 and 17 in the California city, and speculation has mounted that it could be the venue for a rapprochement.

The White House had begun making plans for a meeting on the sidelines of the summit in a bid to stabilize relations, The Washington Post reported, quoting one official as saying “it’s pretty firm”.

France Closes Schools Over Bedbug Crisis



France says it has closed seven schools this week due to bedbug infestations.

PARIS (AFP) – France has been forced to shut seven schools over growing concerns over an infestation of bedbugs, the education minister has said.

“Bedbugs were detected at various levels in ... I believe 17 institutions, and currently as I speak to you, seven institutions are closed for this reason,” Gabriel Attal told France 5 television.

The French government has held a series of meetings this week to examine surging numbers of reported bedbug cases at a time when France is hosting the Rugby World Cup and preparing to host the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Earlier, the education ministry said in statement to Agence France-Presse that five schools with a total of 1,500 students had been closed.

Earlier this week, authorities announced two schools – one in Marseille and the other in Villefranche-sur-Saone outside Lyon in south-eastern France – had been shut down for cleaning.

“We have almost 60,000 institutions and we’re only talking about a few dozen here, but it’s true that cases are piling up,” Attal said. “An immediate response is needed, so that we can have institutions treated

within 24 hours.”

He said a list of “approved and recognized” companies had been prepared in collaboration with the ministry of health and regional health agencies “so that the heads of schools can have the contacts and have them intervene very quickly”.

A municipal library in the northern city of Amiens is due to reopen on Saturday after being closed for several days after bedbugs were detected in public reading spaces, the city’s mayor, Brigitte Fouré, said.

A sniffer dog found no trace of the pests after the library was treated, she said.

A tenth of all French households are believed to have had a bedbug problem over the past few years, usually requiring a pest control operation costing several hundred euros which often needs to be repeated.

The blood-sucking insects have been spotted in the Paris metro, high-speed trains and at Paris’s Charles De Gaulle airport.

But the individual cases have not been confirmed by the authorities and RMC TV reported that a investigation by Paris transport operator RATP had found no bedbugs on its services.

UAW President: Strike Working, Automakers Made Concessions

CHICAGO (Xinhua) – United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain has proclaimed that “our strike is working,” after the Big Three U.S. automakers made concessions in the negotiations this week.

“We are making significant progress,” Fain said during a Facebook livestream Friday afternoon as the union’s strike against the Big Three U.S. automakers entered the 22nd day. “In just three weeks, we have moved these companies further than anyone thought was possible.”

General Motors (GM) agreed to place its battery plants under the union’s national agreement at the last minute as the union was preparing to expand the strike to the Detroit-based automaker’s full-size SUV plant in Arlington, Texas, on Friday.

GM’s decision to include battery-plant workers in the master agreement “lays the foundation for a just transition” to electric vehicles, Fain said. GM has also agreed to a 23-percent wage hike.

In a letter to employees following Fain’s livestream, Stellantis NV’s Chief Operating Officer for North America Mark Stewart said the company’s offer is a 21.4 percent compounded wage raise through 2027, including an immediate 10-percent raise upon ratification.

Ford has offered workers a 23-percent not compounded wage increase by April 2028, and promised to get there in three years instead of the current eight-year progression, Fain said. GM and Stellantis remain at four years.

On cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), Ford and Stellantis have agreed to reinstate the traditional formula that was suspended in 2009. GM isn’t far behind, Fain said. Stellantis said its COLA would be calculated every quarter, added to every hour earned and included in weekly paychecks.

On job security, Ford agreed to allow the union to strike over plant

closures, while Stellantis, at the last minute last week to stave off a strike expansion, agreed to give workers the right not to cross a picket line and to strike in the event of a plant closure, as well.

For temporary and supplemental workers, Ford is offering a wage of 21 dollars per hour, while GM and Stellantis 20 dollars per hour, Fain said. The Big Three have made commitments to converting temporary workers to full-time, but he didn’t share details. Ford previously agreed to convert current temporary workers with at least three months of experience to full-time.

The union continues to fight for improved pension benefits for those with pensions, as well as the expansion of pensions and post-retirement health care to workers hired after the ratification of the 2007 agreements. Those workers receive 401(k) contributions and don’t have company-provided health care into retirement.

Stellantis said it has offered more than 1 billion dollars in contributions to retirement funding and “significant improvements” to its 401(k) contribution. Ford said it has increased 401(k) contributions. GM’s previous offers included payments to active and retired UAW members.

Details on profit sharing weren’t provided. There’s “still a lot of work to be done both on the wages and the conversions,” Fain said.

“This strike is about righting the wrongs of the past and winning justice for all of our members,” Fain said.

The impact of the UAW’s strike keeps spreading. Ford on Friday asked almost 500 more workers not to report to work as a result of the union’s strike beginning Sept. 29 at its SUV assembly plant in Chicago, including 25 employees at Sterling Axle Plant effective between Thursday and Sunday, 372 workers at Cleveland Engine Plant and 94 employees at Lima Engine Plant effective Monday.

News in Brief

COPENHAGEN (Xinhua) – North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries were sternly reprimanded on Saturday for “supplying cluster munitions or failing to condemn their supply and use.” “Circumstances under which the use of cluster munitions is acceptable simply don’t exist,” said Charlotte Slente, secretary-general of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), an NGO refugee relief organization clearing mines in eight countries.

Invited to speak with the Parliamentary Assembly during the 69th annual session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Copenhagen, Slente criticized the lack of condemnation on cluster munitions from other countries. “The United States providing cluster bombs to Ukraine is reprehensible and cannot be defended in any way,” she said. “Using it on either side of the war is absolutely unjustifiable, no matter the circumstances, and so is supplying it to the fighting parties. There is no excuse or exception,” she added.

KOLKATA (AFP) – At least 56 people are confirmed dead in floods that hit India’s northeast as of Saturday, with the army warning munitions washed away by the deluge posed a public safety risk. Violent torrents struck Sikkim state on Wednesday after the sudden bursting of a high-altitude glacial lake. Climate scientists warn that similar disasters will become an increasing danger across the Himalayas as global temperatures rise and ice melts. “So far 26 bodies have been found in Sikkim,” state relief commissioner Aniraj Rai told AFP by phone. Thirty more bodies had been recovered from the Teesta river basin by search and rescue teams downstream in neighbouring West Bengal state, Jalpaiguri district police superintendent K. Umesh Ganpat told AFP. “The river stretches up to 86 kilometres,” he added. “The search operation is continuing.” Among the dead are seven Indian army soldiers posted in Sikkim, which sits on India’s remote frontiers with Nepal and China and boasts a sizeable military presence.

BOGOTA (Dispatches) – Six Colombian inmates killed in a prison in Ecuador were all suspects in the murder of the country’s anticorruption presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio earlier this year, Ecuadorian authorities have confirmed.

The killings took place on Friday in Litoral Penitentiary in Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city, the attorney general’s office said. The SNAI prisons agency said in a statement that the six men who were killed were Colombian nationals. They “are of Colombian nationality and were accused of the murder of the former presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio”, the prison authority said. Ecuador’s government condemned the prison killings and President Guillermo Lasso pledged in a message on social media that there would be “neither complicity nor cover-up” in getting to the bottom of who killed the suspects in the Villavicencio case.

LOS ANGELES (Xinhua) – A funeral home in the U.S. state of Colorado is under investigation after more than 100 rotting bodies were found at the facility, local authorities said Friday. The deceased bodies were discovered on Wednesday in the Return to Nature Funeral Home in Penrose, a town in Fremont County. Police took a closer look at the “green” funeral operator’s storage facility and found at least 115 decomposing bodies inside. Fremont County Sheriff Allen Cooper told a news conference that “during the last 48 hours, my office made a very disturbing discovery.” “The area of the funeral home where the bodies were improperly stored was horrific,” he said. “There have been a lot of questions and concerns expressed by the community, especially those families who entrusted their loved ones to this funeral home. Our priority and our focus are on the families,” said Cooper, adding that officials are committed to finding answers for the families as quickly as possible. Fremont County Coroner Randy Keller also said at the conference that “after making entry into the facility, we found over 100 decedents, who were improperly stored and has created a hazardous scene.”

MEXICO CITY (AP) – At least 16 migrants from Venezuela and Haiti died early Friday in a bus crash in southern Mexico, authorities said. Mexico’s National Immigration Institute originally reported 18 dead, but later lowered that figure. Prosecutors in the southern state of Oaxaca later said there had been an overcount due to some of the bodies being dismembered, and that the real death toll was 16, AP reported. Both sources said the dead include two women and three children, and that 29 people were injured. There was no immediate information on their condition. Photos from the scene showed the bus rolled over onto its side on a curvy section of highway in the southern state of Oaxaca. The cause of the crash in the town of Tepelmeme, near the border with the neighboring state of Puebla, is under investigation. The institute said a total of 55 migrants, mostly from Venezuela, were aboard the vehicle.

MUMBAI (AFP) – India has sent notices to social media platforms X, formerly known as Twitter, YouTube and Telegram, asking them to ensure there is no child sexual abuse material on their platforms, the government said. The companies could be stripped of their protection from legal liability if they don’t comply, the government said in a statement. The notices, sent by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY), emphasized the importance of prompt and permanent removal of any child sexual abuse material on the platforms. “If they do not act swiftly, their safe harbor under section 79 of the IT Act would be withdrawn and consequences under the Indian law will follow,” the junior minister for information technology, Rajeev Chandrashekar, was quoted as saying in the statement. Chandrasekar has been a vocal advocate for removing such content from the internet in India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government was determined “to build a safe and trusted internet under the IT rules”, the government said.