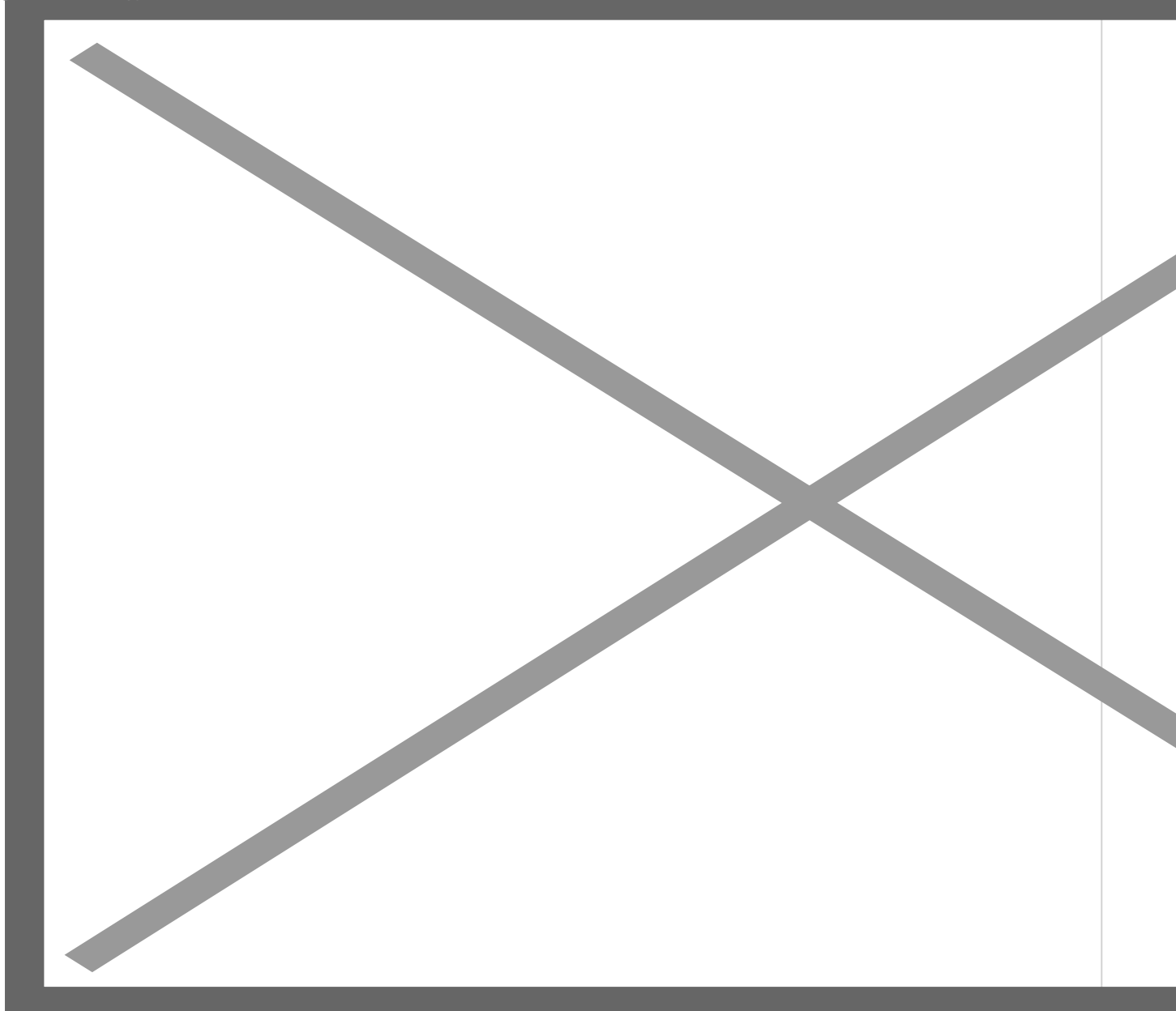


French police clash with protesters after racist gunman kills three

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French police and protesters clash after gunshots were fired killing 3 people and injuring several others in a central district of Paris?

Paris, December 24 (RHC)-- Protesters have taken to the streets in central Paris after a racist gunman killed at least three people and injured several others in a shooting attack on a Kurdish cultural center in the French capital.

“There are three dead, one person in intensive care and two people with serious injuries, and the suspect, who was arrested, has also been injured, notably to the face,” a French prosecutor told reporters in Paris at the scene of the incident on Friday.

A short distance from the site of the shooting, members of Paris' Kurdish community clashed with police later in the day, with riot police firing teargas to disperse the angry protesters. According to reports, projectiles were thrown at police officers and at least one car was damaged.

Meanwhile, the French prosecutor said the 69-year-old suspect of the attack had been previously charged with racist violence. However, the investigators have yet to officially determine a motive for the attack at the Kurdish community center, the restaurant facing it, and the adjacent hair salon.

AFP news agency quoted witnesses as saying they heard seven or eight shots fired. Witnesses told AFP that the gunman, described by police as white, initially targeted the Kurdish cultural center before entering a hairdressing salon where he was arrested by police.

"We saw an old white man enter, then start shooting in the Kurdish cultural center, then he went to the hairdresser's next door," Romain, who works in a nearby restaurant, told AFP by telephone. Another local resident, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP: "There were people panicking, shouting to the police and pointing to the salon 'He's in there, he's in there. Go in'." He said he saw two people on the floor of the salon with leg wounds.

Of the three wounded people, one is in intensive care and two are being treated for serious injuries, officials said.

The Kurdish community center, called Center Ahmet Kaya, is used by a charity that organizes concerts and exhibitions, and helps the Kurdish diaspora in the Paris region. According to local media reports, the suspect's criminal records from 2016 and 2021 showed he was linked to two previous attempted murders.

The suspect, of French nationality, was initially convicted over the first case in the multicultural Seine-Saint-Denis suburb of Paris, but was freed on appeal, Paris prosecutor Laure Beccau told reporters. He had attacked at least two migrants with a knife in a Paris refugee camp on December 8, 2021, Beccau told reporters.

In that attack, the Frenchman, a retired train driver, was also believed to have damaged several tents, allegedly attacking migrants sleeping in them in the refugee camp located at the Bercy Park in eastern Paris, in December 2021, Beccau said.

The assailant was subsequently charged with premeditated armed violence with a racist motive, and placed in detention, the prosecutor said, adding that the man had been released from jail only recently. She said the question of whether Friday's attack was motivated by racism "will obviously form part of our investigations which are starting now with the deployment of large numbers of people." "An investigation has been opened for murder, voluntary manslaughter and aggravated violence," she added.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said that he would travel to the scene of the "dramatic" shooting. "He was clearly targeting foreigners," Darmanin told reporters, adding however that it was "not certain" that the man was aiming to kill "Kurds in particular."

France's specialized anti-terror prosecutor's office has not taken over the case so far, indicating that the triple murder is being treated as a regular violent crime at this stage.

"The far right seems to have struck again. With deadly consequences," senior left-wing MP Clementine Autain wrote on Twitter, warning that "When will those at the head of the state take this terrorist threat seriously?"

Meanwhile, the Kurdish Democratic Council of France (CDK-F), which uses the cultural center as its headquarters, said in a statement that it considered the shooting to be a "terror attack." The shooting comes as the French capital city is bustling with activity before the Christmas weekend.

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