**Greece Racist Violence Grows Amid Financial Crisis**

**Agence France Presse**  |  By Isabel MalsangPosted: 07/15/2013 4:25 am EDT  |  Updated: 07/15/2013 10:39 am EDT

Omar Diallo's head is still swollen after a recent assault on the streets of Athens which left him with several stitches.

Having fled his troubled homeland of Guinea, the 28-year-old is no stranger to violence, but the virulent racism he says he has experienced in crisis-hit Greece has come as a shock.

In the Athens neighbourhood where he lives -- an area full of empty, graffiti-covered shops with "for rent" and "for sale" signs on the windows -- it has become increasingly dangerous to be a dark-skinned foreigner.

"There are zones where we no longer have the right to go, or where we can only go in groups."

He was on his own when he was assaulted. The attack was swift and silent, unaccompanied by racist taunts or demands.

"Four people got hold of me on the street, one of them hit me with some object on the head. I fell down and they hit me. When they finished, they left."

Omar fled his west African home after a September 2009 stadium massacre during an opposition rally. His father was among the 157 killed, while he was thrown in jail.

After being released he decided to leave his country where he said he feared for his life.

But just a few years after coming to Athens in search of a better future, he found himself lying in the street, blood dripping from his head, until police officers found him and took him to the hospital.

His story is not unique.

"I saw a young Pakistani being beaten right in front of me, by two giants, who ran through the whole bus to get to him and then kicked him violently out on the street. I did not interfere because I was scared," a mortified retired Frenchman, who has been living in Athens for a year, told AFP.

A watchdog recording racial violence counted 154 victims in 2012, 107 of whom were assaulted in Athens. In at least eight cases, victims or witnesses said they recognised people associated with neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn.

Omar, who used to study international relations in Conakry, feels that racial attacks have surged since conservative Prime Minister Antonis Samaras came to power in June 2012.

That is when Golden Dawn was elected into parliament for the first time, winning 18 seats out of an overall 300.

"They felt politically fortified," Omar said.

According to the report on racial violence, only 24 of the victims made a formal complaint to the police in 2012.

"In my understanding, they (perpetrators) try not to kill, but to make visible injuries, so as to spread the fear to the communities," said Doctor Nikitas Kanakis, secretary general of the Greek branch of the non-governmental group Doctors of the World.

Kanakis has long tried to highlight the problem, and victims of racial attacks often turn to him instead of going to a hospital.

He has brought attention to several attacks such as the case of a 14-year-old Afghan boy, whose face was slashed by a broken bottle in an Athens neighbourhood dominated by neo-Nazis.

"Almost every day in various parts of the country, particularly in Athens, racist attacks occur," said Giorgos Tsabropoulos, head of the UNHCR's Athens office.

The government's response to the problem has been ambiguous.

It has condemned Golden Dawn's attacks as unacceptable, and Public Order Minister Nikos Dendias recently told the BBC that "Golden Dawn... is clearly a neo-Nazi party."

He said a special police unit had been created to deal with racist crimes and "that the people who act unlawfully should end up in prison."

But in the same interview he said "creating new legislation won't help" , despite being under pressure from the Council of Europe to do so.

Dendias said the rise of Golden Dawn and its xenophobic and racist doctrine was linked to a surge in undocumented migrants arriving in Greece, which he said were "are a huge burden to our society."

Dendias has appealed to the EU for financial aid to deal with the increasing number of migrants.

The premier recently made a big show of his meeting with Greek star basketball player of Nigerian origin Giannis Adetokunbo, who was drafted into the NBA, to counter accusations of racism.

Eva Cosse from Human Rights Watch admits that there has been some progress, notably the appointment of a special prosecutor in Athens, but "there is still a lot of work to do."

"They need to assure that every migrant and asylum seeker, even undocumented, has the right to access the judicial system," she told AFP.

Meanwhile, the US Embassy in Greece has warned US citizens travelling to Greece to be wary of "a rise in unprovoked harassment and violent attacks against persons who, because of their complexion, are perceived as foreign migrants."

"US citizens most at risk are those of African, Asian, Hispanic or Middle Eastern descent in Athens and other major cities," the statement on the embassy's website, first posted last November, reads.

1. Analyze why the Greeks are turning violent towards new immigrants and tourists.

# France's Burqa Ban Adds To Anti-Muslim Climate

by [**ELEANOR BEARDSLEY**](http://www.npr.org/people/17796129/eleanor-beardsley)

April 11, 2011 2:01 AM

A law banning the face-covering Muslim veil takes effect Monday in France, where the garments are called burqa or niqab. President Nicolas Sarkozy says the veils are an assault on French values of secularism and equality of the sexes, and now they can no longer be worn in public. Critics say the French president is trying to attract right-wing voters by focusing on Muslims.

On a recent warm spring afternoon, at a mosque in the Paris suburb of Aubervilliers, the faithful gather for Friday prayers. The imam told the men to scoot closer.

"You know, there is an Islamophobic climate here right now, and the police don't like to see us praying in the streets," he says.

Outside the makeshift mosque, housed in an old office building, men kneel on carpets. Rachid Zaieri says for the most part it's fine being a Muslim in France — though he says there has been a rise in political talk against Islam in the past few years, and this burqa ban is a part of that.

"We don't feel this law is sincere," he says. "It doesn't mean we're for the burqa. But we think the law is just an excuse to tell French people, 'Watch out, there is a growing Muslim population that you should be afraid of.' "

Many Muslims here blame Sarkozy for what they say is an anti-Muslim climate in France today. They say the president creates debates around Islam so that people will forget about real problems, like the economy.

In the women's section of the mosque, everyone wears loose- and long-fitting clothing and headscarves. But only a scarce few wear the niqab, a full face-covering veil that leaves just a slit for the eyes. Even by the French government's own estimates, fewer than 2,000 women across the country wear the niqab. Someya, who doesn't want to give her last name, is one of them.

"I feel like I'm doing something higher," the 22-year-old says. "I'm wearing it for God and for my husband, so that he'll be the only person who can see me and be able to appreciate my face."

Someya says she'll take off her niqab Monday because she has no choice. But she believes the government is infringing on her personal freedoms.

Sarah Morvan, an 18-year-old Muslim convert who also wears the niqab, has just pulled on her long black gloves and stepped out onto the street. Not a bit of skin is showing. Morvan says the new law will only force her to stay at home more often with her 3-month-old daughter, whom she pushes in a stroller in the afternoon sun.

It's a very emotional experience to wear the niqab, says Morvan, who embraced wearing it two years ago. You are sheltered from all onlookers and completely cut off from society, she says.

That is exactly why the French government is banning it. Sarkozy says the niqab and burqa isolate women and take away their humanity. The French immigration minister called the burqa a "walking coffin."

So starting Monday, police will ask women to uncover their faces and show their IDs. If they refuse, they could be fined up to $200 and forced to attend a civics class. The punishment is stiffer for any man caught forcing a woman to cover her face. They're subject to a fine of up to $40,000 and possible jail time.

Aubervilliers is 70 percent Muslim. Many, like cafe owner Kamel Mesbah, say they understand the intent of the law, to weaken what he calls the burqa culture.

You can't have things like men and women refusing to shake each other's hands, and separate hours for boys and girls at the public swimming pool, he says. That's just not France.

**UK's message to immigrants: Stay out**

By **Ruben Navarrette**, CNN Contributor updated 11:40 AM EDT, Thu October 24, 2013

**San Diego (CNN)** -- Just this summer, the British government was directly targeting illegal immigrants with a campaign that turned heads, and, in many cases, turned stomachs.

In [an initiative designed to persuade illegal immigrants to pack up](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304410204579143523569148330" \t "_blank) and voluntarily return to their home countries, officials deployed two trucks to drive around London for a week. Each vehicle carried a large billboard with the message: "In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest." Then it offered instructions to text the word "home" to a government-run number for "free advice and help with travel documents."

What was the free advice? Sounded like "Get the hell out!" Not exactly the Welcome Wagon, was it? The campaign stirred up so much public outcry that the government backtracked and decided to keep the trucks in the garage.

But there's more, and it's still happening. According to a recent article in The Wall Street Journal, the Conservative Party of Prime Minister David Cameron has pledged to reduce annual net migration to the United Kingdom. For the British, the problem is Eastern Europeans. The annual figure of newcomers is about 200,000. The conservatives want to bring it down to the tens of thousands.

This is just plain foolish. Just who does the British government think is going to swoop in and take over the jobs that are left behind if immigrants are run off? British citizens? Not blooming likely. By now, several generations of British citizens have grown up thinking of these kinds of jobs as beneath them and themselves as entitled to better. They're not going to miraculously change their way of thinking and find their way back to this kind of work just because the immigrants are gone.

European countries -- Great Britain, France, Germany, etc. -- don't have the best track record of dealing with racial and ethnic differences. Besides, it's not every day that a country puts up a "no vacancy" sign to keep out even those immigrants who come legally. Most countries like to at least maintain the pretense that they only have a problem with illegal entrants. If nothing else, this approach is refreshingly honest.

It seems that Americans haven't exactly cornered the market on bigotry and xenophobia.

Sure, we have our own peculiar issues with the foreign-born. It's not easy being a nation of immigrants that has, in reality, always despised immigrants. It's tough being a country that boasts about its diversity, and then does everything it can to boil it away in the fabled melting pot.

But we Americans are not alone in our narrow-mindedness. Just about every industrialized country on the globe vacillates between needing immigrants to do jobs that natives won't do and resenting the changes that immigrants bring with them.

Parts of the immigration debate playing out on the national and international stage are complicated. And yet this part is simple: Countries that encourage legal immigration, and make the process easier, will thrive. Those that pull up the drawbridge and put up barriers to keep out even immigrants who try to enter legally will founder.

Who says? Economists say so. Life experience says so. U.S. history says so. World history says so.

This is true of legal immigrants whether they come from China, Vietnam, India, Brazil or any other country.

Yet it is also the case with illegal immigrants, as former [Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan made clear in April 2009](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?sid=aeQKG53ULolk&pid=newsarchive" \t "_blank) when he testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security.

Greenspan said illegal immigration make a "significant" contribution to U.S. economic growth by providing a flexible workforce and that illegal immigrants act as a "safety valve" for the economy since demand for workers goes up and down.

"There is little doubt that unauthorized, that is, illegal, immigration has made a significant contribution to the growth of our economy," Greenspan said in calling for an overhaul of U.S. immigration laws.

We can assume Cameron's government didn't get the news.

After those trucks drove around six areas of London, humanitarian organizations, opposition parties and labor groups in the United Kingdom complained that the tactics were offensive and heavy-handed. They said they harked back to an ugly time in British history when nativist groups had much greater sway in the halls of government.

What a shame that this is what has become of a once-great nation and one of the world's great superpowers. Now the United Kingdom is in a defensive stance, trying to ward off invaders and hold on to what it has.

Contrast all this with what is happening in Israel. Consider the diversity of the tech corridor in Tel Aviv, where some of Silicon Valley's most successful companies come to poach workers and invest venture capital. Everywhere you go, you're reminded that Israel is one of the most diverse nations in the world and one with a proud immigrant tradition.

Israeli officials will tell you, without hesitation, that much of what has been accomplished in the country's lifespan of only 65 years can be attributed to the fact that this tiny country benefits from immigrants and draws the best and brightest from around the world.

Of course, no nation is perfect. The Israelis have their own problems with immigration. They struggle with the challenge of assimilation of refugees from Sudan and Ethiopia. But still, they understand the restorative power of immigration.

Meanwhile, at least the United Kingdom's government realized the error of its ways when it shelved the billboards. Government officials acknowledged that the message was too blunt and the results unconvincing.

Score one for decency and common sense. Don't you just love it when old Europe learns a new way of thinking?