

France ‘double standards’: Prison for Mosque offence, fines for Femen church affront

By RT News, a Russian TV Network, Published time: October 16, 2014 08:10¹



A French prosecutor is demanding three to four months of suspended sentence and around a \$2,000 fine for an ex-Femen activist, who imitated abortion in a Paris church. A similar act in a French mosque resulted in harsher sentences for offenders.

Eloïse Bouton, 31, then a Femen member, was topless when she got inside the Catholic Madeleine Church in Paris a few days before Christmas 2013. She simulated an abortion by carrying to the altar pieces of a calf’s liver, symbolically representing the fetus. The act culminated in Bouton urinating on the altar’s steps.

Bouton, who quit Femen after the incident, citing “*personal reasons*,” appeared in a court in Paris to face trial for “*indecent exposure*,” on Wednesday.

The prosecutor requested three to four months of suspended sentence and a 1,500-euro fine (around \$1,920).

Bouton’s lawyer insists that what his defendant did was a political protest and not an act of public exhibition, and asked for the international law on freedom of expression to be applied in her case.

The verdict in Bouton’s case won’t be announced until mid-December. Meanwhile, the French justice system has already proven mild to Femen activists.

¹ Internet reference: <http://rt.com/news/196096-femen-church-mosque-islamophobia/>

Last month, France’s court cleared the activists, who staged a topless protest in the iconic Notre Dame cathedral in Paris in February 2013. The female group then marked Pope Benedict XVI’s resignation by shouting slogans like “*Bye-bye Benedict!*” and “*No more homophobe!*”



The only convictions in the case were eventually the fines imposed not on the topless protesters in the landmark Paris cathedral, but on the security staff of Notre Dame, who pulled the women away from the church. The fines of up to 1,000 euro (about \$ 1,264) were suspended.

However, French justice has been tougher on offenders in a mosque.

A group which placed a pig’s head outside a mosque in the French overseas territory of Mayotte in January saw its members convicted of “*incitement to hatred, violence or discrimination because of religious affiliation.*” They were given prison sentences.

The act was carried out by Sarah Leduc, 36, and Malika Lenormand, 44 with the help of Leduc’s partner Constable Sébastien Milin, 34. The three claimed it was a result of a bet made while they were drunk at a New Year’s Eve party.

The act caused outrage among Mayotte’s population, 95 percent of whom are Muslim.



Leduc and Lenormand were sentenced to nine months, six months of which were suspended, while Milin received a six-month suspended prison sentence.

They also got two years' probation work, were fined 3,000 euro (\$3,796) each and were forced to pay 16,000 euro (\$20,249) in compensation to the mosque.

According to Julien Pinelli, the lawyer defending the trio, the fact that the population in the area is almost entirely Muslim influenced the court's decision.

"It was a special case because it took place in Mayotte, where 95 percent of the population are Muslims, so I think this aspect of the case had an influence on the decision that has been made," he told RT.

Pinelli launched a formal appeal based on the fact that blasphemy and sacrilege are not criminal offences in France. However, he believes the country should protect all its holy places and the French penal code needs to reflect this.

The difference in verdicts for similar acts in churches and mosques is explained by political reasons, believes Frederic Pichon, president of the association of free lawyers.

"Femen have judiciary protection for ideological reasons," Pichon told RT. *"Fifty years ago there were only four mosques in France for 1 million Muslims. Now we have 8 million Muslims and almost 3,000 mosques."*

He added that France has *"double standards."*

"If you attack Christianity, it's free expression. If you attack Islamism, it's Islamophobia."