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Russia's Muslim Leaders Condemn 'Sin of Provocation' After Charlie Hebdo Attack

By Anna Dolgov

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Police and rescue forces are seen near the scene after a shooting at the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical newspaper, on Jan. 7, 2015.

Russia's Muslim leaders have condemned the terror attack on French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo but appeared to spread the blame for the mass shooting that claimed 12 lives by suggesting the publication was guilty of the "sin of provocation."

While Russia's Council of Muftis, the country's main Muslim leadership organization, said in a statement Wednesday that terrorism is indefensible, it also suggested that attacks may be unavoidable unless satirists stop "provoking" the faithful.

"Perhaps the sin of provocation in our world is no less dangerous for the preservation of peace than the sin of those who are capable of succumbing to that provocation," the group

said in a statement published on its website.

"Insulting the feelings of the faithful is unacceptable, as are any expressions of extremism, any infringement on the lives of peaceful people," the statement said.

Gunmen burst into the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo during a weekly staff meeting on Wednesday and opened fire, killing 12 people including the newspaper's editor Stephane Charbonnier and some of the nation's best-known cartoonists.

The attack is believed to be the deadliest in France in over half a century, the BBC reported.

In videos filmed by witnesses from a nearby rooftop, gunmen can be heard shouting "Allahu Akbar" — "God is great" in Arabic — as one of them shoots a wounded police officer point-blank. The attackers then calmly climb into a getaway car and drive off.

Witnesses told the BBC that the gunmen shouted "we have avenged the Prophet Muhammad" during the attack.

A staunchly irreverent publication, Charlie Hebdo has lampooned just about every political and religious movement in the world, but aroused the most controversy and anger with its caricatures of Islamic leaders.

The newspaper's offices were firebombed in 2011 the day after it published an issue featuring a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad on its front cover.

French officials and police have identified brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi and 18-year-old Hamyd Mourad as suspects in the attack. According to media reports, Cherif Kouachi had been convicted of recruiting fighters to battle American forces in Iraq.

Mourad reportedly walked into a police station outside of Paris last night and surrendered himself to the authorities.

Russia's Mufti Council expressed its condolences to those affected by the mass shooting and said that it "angrily condemns" the attack.

But it went on to stress the "importance of the uttered and printed word" and urged media organizations to self-censor so as to avoid offending the faithful.

"We appeal to everyone who has access to mass media, who holds influence over the public consciousness, to remember about internal censorship, about respecting the feelings of people from another culture," the statement said.

The muftis also said that the Koran prohibits murder and warned that the "executors of this evil" will receive their "due punishment" from God.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday also expressed his condolences to the victims' loved ones, as well as all Parisians.

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