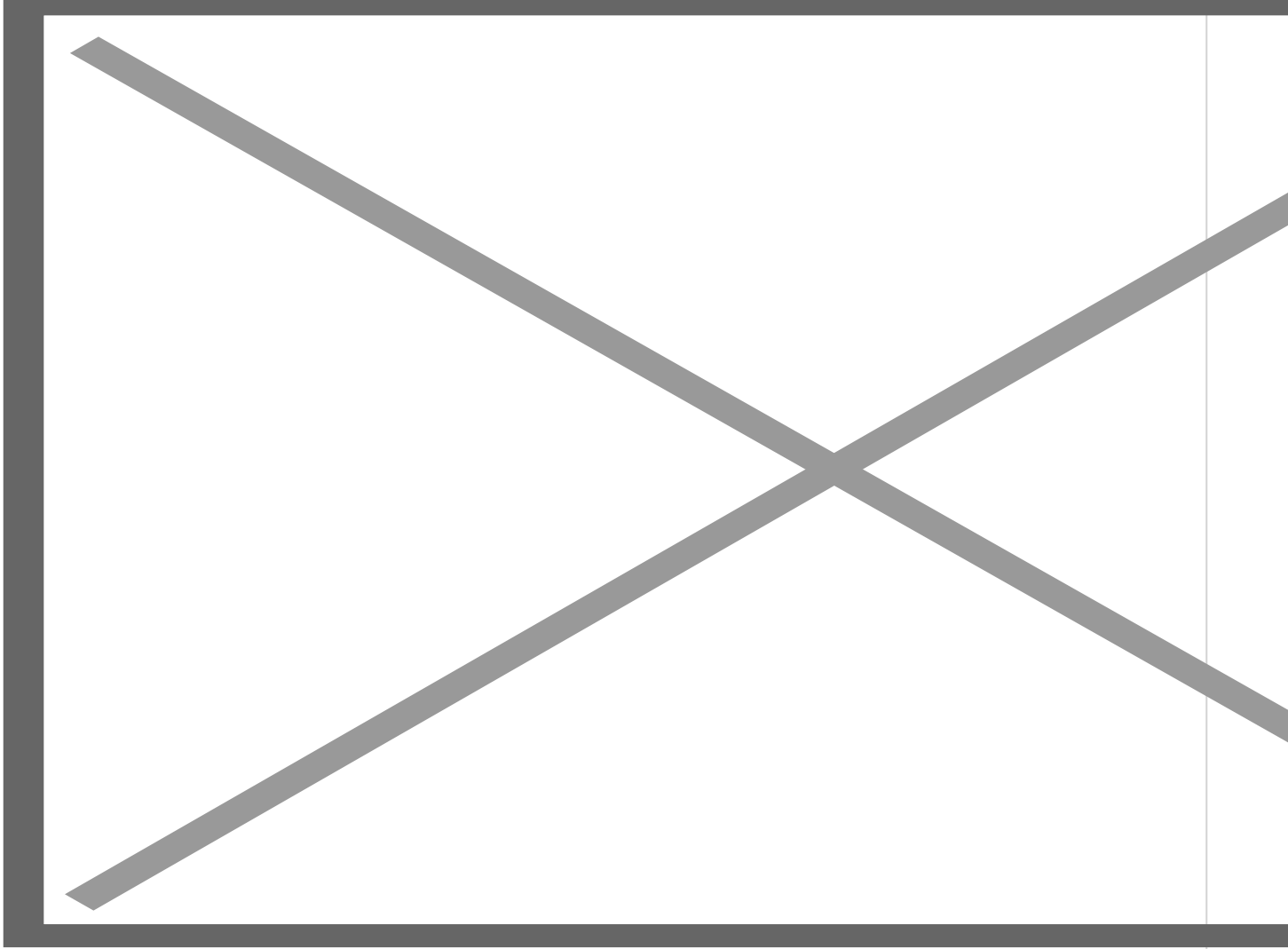


France under fire at UN for racism, police violence against protesters

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A police officer holds a weapon during a demonstration in Lille, northern France, on April 13, 2023. (Photo by AP)

United Nations, May 2 (RHC)-- France has come under fire by several states at the United Nations over racism and police violence, including against demonstrators during mass rallies over a controversial pension reform bill that finally became law.

On Monday, the French government was accused of conducting attacks on migrants, racial profiling and religious intolerance during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which examines the human rights record of all the 193 UN member states every four years.

In his address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Sweden's representative said France must "take measures to, in a transparent manner, address allegations regarding excessive use of force by police and gendarmerie against protesters during demonstrations."

Sweden was not the only country to censure France over its alleged human rights abuses; other member states also raised similar concerns, including Denmark, Liechtenstein, Norway, Russia, Venezuela and Iran. "We are concerned about the harsh and sometimes violent measures aimed at dispersing peaceful citizens," Russia's representative Kristina Sukacheva told the Council.

During the review, several countries, including the United States and China, also urged France to do more to battle racial and religious discrimination. In her address to the Council, U.S. representative Kelly Billingsley said Washington had called on Paris to "expand efforts to counter crimes and threats of violence motivated by religious hatred such as anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hate, including cases of harassment, vandalism, and assault."

The United States itself is under fire for police violence and other serious and widespread human rights violations.

China, for its part, denounced "a rise of racism and xenophobia" in France, urging Paris to "stop ... measures that violate rights of migrants." Two other countries – Brazil and Japan – also lambasted "racial profiling by security forces" in France.

Up to 1.5 million protesters filled the streets in France to mark the May 1 workers day, even as President Emmanuel Macron desperately strives to unify a country divided over his contested pension law that has sparked anger, pan-bashing and social unrest.

The controversial bill, which was signed into law on April 16 and is aimed at raising the retirement age from 62 to 64, has sparked numerous violent protests and strikes across the country over the past several months. Polls have consistently recorded a majority of French opposed to the reform, which the government rammed through parliament using a controversial mechanism to avoid a vote. The new law is set to be implemented on September 1.

Mass rallies on Monday echoed growing criticism in the European country of the police for disproportionate use of force in dealing with demonstrators.

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