

French police warn the government: 'We're at breaking point'



French police have sent a stark warning to the government after another weekend of violence in cities around the country left them “at breaking point”.

The protests began in France four weeks ago against the government’s planned fuel tax hikes and got off to a mainly peaceful start.

But since then they have grown increasingly violent and the list of grievances and gripes against President Emmanuel Macron and his government have ballooned.

While the anger and hatred of protesters is directed at the president, it is being taken out on the country’s police forces. For the last three Saturday’s they have come under a hail of cobblestones and bottles, had fireworks aimed at them and at times simply been given the run around by rioters and looters.

Although their response to violence has not always been exemplary as some videos on social media can attest to the French police say they are tired of being the punchbag for Macron and his government..

Last weekend all police leave was cancelled in Paris and 8,000 officers took to the streets of the capital. The previous weekend there were 5,000 on duty when they were overrun by rioters and looters.

Rocco Contento, representative for the Paris Unité-SGP police union, told Franceinfo that the police had been stretched to their limits.

“Police resources are not inexhaustible. We were practically at our maximum. 89 000 members of the armed forces throughout France... We can’t do any more,” he said.

He went on to warn that an untenable amount of pressure has been put on the police to manage a crisis that politicians are responsible for.

“We also want to take off our vests. Not the yellow vests, but our blue vests if this continues. That’s the message that I want to give to the highest state authorities. We are in a political crisis. It’s not up to the police force to get us out of it, it’s up to politicians,” he said.



(AFP)

Working back-to-back days of long hours in hostile conditions, with breaks and meal times often cancelled, has left police officers exhausted according to Denis Jacob, the spokesman for national police union Alternative Police.

They said of last Saturday’s protests: “If the police have managed the situation perfectly well, with the number of injured significantly lower than the number of those taken in for questioning (1723) the fact remains that we are very tired and weary after successive missions.”

While the police “risk their lives” at work Alternative Police states that unpaid overtime and underpaid night shifts have left them suffering the same poor living conditions as the yellow vests they confront at the weekends.

“Between their responsibility to carry out their missions, maintain order and guarantee everyone’s safety and the feeling that they too are affected by the demands of the yellow vests when it comes to spending power, the police are at breaking point,” they said.

The union has called on the government to deploy an emergency budget to compensate police officers “as a way of showing the gratitude that they like so much to assure us of.”

If their demands are not met they warn the consequences could be serious.

“The police, exhausted, could end up putting down their helmets and shields,” said the union

The union also sent an open letter to French lawmakers on Monday with a list of demands aimed at improving pay and working conditions of police across the country.

The letter signed by Denis Jacob spoke of the “exhaustion, weariness and deep

anger” of the police.

“Since November, police have been permanently mobilized for the different gatherings and demonstrations of yellow vests which have share of violence, looting

“The police officers have shown great professionalism and great self-sacrifice and self-control which are matched only by their willingness to serve the nation and their fellow citizens.

“However, the police are also men and women, fathers and mothers, and like any citizen they are concerned by the social crisis and the purchasing power.”

by Joanna York

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