

HYPER CACHER ATTACK – One Year On

Victim's cousin: 'Our family has imploded'



Yohan Cohen

On the first anniversary of the Paris kosher supermarket attack, the cousin of Yohan Cohen, one of the victims, talks to **Sharon Feinstein** about the devastating impact of his murder.



A policeman on guard outside the Hyper Cacher supermarket after last year's attack.

Photo: JTA

THE cousin of a Jewish man killed in the Hyper Cacher terrorist attack in Paris one year ago revealed last week that the family was "dreading the anniversary", after his brutal murder split them in two.

Rachel Bourlier, whose first cousin Yohan Cohen, a part-time student, was shot dead by gunman Amedy Coulibaly in the kosher deli, told the UK *Jewish News* that the family had fallen apart after the attack, with some moving to Israel and others staying in France.

"The family has imploded," said Bourlier, 43, who herself narrowly avoided being at the Bataclan concert theatre last November after changing her plans at the last minute.

Cohen's parents moved to Israel because he is buried there, she said, but his grandmother Rosa, 74, with whom he lived, chose to stay in the French capital, as did Bourlier.

"My aunt is completely broken,"

says Bourlier, revealing that Rosa now survives on medication and frequently bursts into tears. "I didn't believe she would be able to live with this pain. We are dreading this weekend's anniversary."

Bourlier herself said she was consumed by guilt, because the last time she saw Cohen alive she had not stopped to say hello.

"The last time I saw him I was very rushed and busy when I stopped at the Hyper Cacher to buy something. I was at the checkout and Yohan was helping a woman, very close to me. I saw him, but he didn't see me. I thought if we stop to say hello we will talk and I am so rushed, so will say hello next time, and left. That was the last time I ever saw him."

Cohen was 20 when he died on January 9, 2015, one of four French Jews killed by Coulibaly, who knew the brothers who targeted *Charlie Hebdo*. He had earlier pledged allegiance to Islamic State and explained later that

he was acting to defend Muslims, in particular Palestinians.

During the attack in Porte de Vincennes, in Paris' 20th arrondissement, Coulibaly took 15 hostages. Witnesses say Cohen was the first to die, having grabbed an abandoned weapon on a counter-top shortly after the gunman entered, only to find that the weapon jammed, at which point Coulibaly is reported to have shot the young employee in the head.

Others to die were Yoav Hattab, François-Michel Saada and Philippe Braham. The siege ended only when police stormed the building and killed Coulibaly. Cohen's friend Lassana Bathily, a Muslim fellow employee from Mali, was subsequently hailed a hero after hiding several shoppers from the gunman in the storeroom downstairs.

On the day of the attack, Rosa pleaded with her grandson not to go into work, fearing the worst after the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* were

attacked only days earlier.

"She always told him to leave the shop, to find a safer job, in a bank or studying, but he loved it because he felt it was like a family," said Bourlier of Cohen's workplace.

"I was in Venice when it happened. She [Rosa] begged him not to go in that day, but he insisted. She said at least stay at the back of the shop, or downstairs, not at the front. She had a bad feeling. She was very close to him."

After his death, Cohen's mother Matilde and father Eric moved to Israel, together with his sister, travelling back to France regularly for events such as the reopening of the Hyper Cacher. But Rosa refuses to go to the site of the supermarket.

"For his father and mother, it is a place where their son was happy, but for my aunt, it is the place where they killed him," said Bourlier. "I understand her position."

His parents were not expected to fly to Paris for the anniversary, said

Bourlier, who – chillingly – had tickets for the Bataclan the night three heavily-armed gunmen killed 89 people in a concert there. "Out of the blue, Liam [her son] had pains in his legs and difficulty walking, so he said maybe we should stay home."

"I apologised to my friend, and then on TV we heard the explosions ... He was sobbing, out of his mind with shock," she says.

Of her neighbours in the Paris suburb of Saint Mandé, which she describes as "very Jewish", she says: "Most of them have sold their apartments and left for Israel. They found the Bataclan terrorists' car in Montreuil, just next to Saint Mandé, so people now think maybe they wanted to kill Jews around this area."

"I am very scared of everything now. You can go like this in one second. I cannot believe you can be killed because you are Jewish. I thought it would never happen again after the Holocaust, yet here we are."

Paris pays tribute to victims

PARIS – The Prime Minister of France, speaking at a ceremony to remember four Jewish victims of terror at a kosher supermarket in Paris, said he regrets that large numbers of his country's Jews have left for Israel.

"France would not be France" without its Jews, Manuel Valls said Saturday evening at the commemoration held outside the Hyper Cacher on the first anniversary of a hostage siege there by an Islamist who was killed that day in a police raid.

Families of the victims and survivors, along with French Jewish leaders, were on hand for the ceremony arranged by the French Jewish umbrella group CRIF.

Valls acknowledged the "immense anguish" of the Jewish community and scolded those who attack it.

"For these enemies who attack their compatriots, who tear apart the contract

that unites us, there can be no worthy explanation," he said.

French immigration to Israel, or aliyah, has rocketed to record levels over the past three years as the country has confronted rising anti-Semitism and a series of attacks that claimed nearly 150 lives in Paris in 2015. Nearly 8,000 French Jews immigrated to Israel in 2015.

"Despite continuing traumatic feelings, life has returned to normal with a renewed sense of fraternity," Rabbi Haim Korsia, the chief rabbi of France, said at the ceremony.

Also on Saturday, French President François Hollande unveiled a plaque in memory of Clarissa Jean-Philippe, a 26-year-old policewoman who was killed by the Hyper Cacher terrorist, Amedy Coulibaly, a day before the supermarket attack in the southern Paris suburb of Montrouge.

On January 5, Hollande unveiled a memorial plaque outside the Hyper Cacher listing the names of those killed at the market on Jan. 9, 2015. He also unveiled a plaque at the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine with the names of the 12 victims of the terrorist attack there two days earlier. Two brothers who were associates of Coulibaly perpetrated the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

A public ceremony was set for Sunday at the Place de la République in Paris to remember the attacks as well as the unity march in the city a year ago that drew 1.6 million people along with French and international leaders. An oak tree was planted during the ceremony in honour of the victims.

Also over the weekend, mosques throughout France opened their doors to visitors. **JTA**



Members of France's Jewish community wave Israeli and French flags at a ceremony outside the Hyper Cacher supermarket a year after the January 9, 2015, terrorist attack.

Photo: Flash 90/Serge Attal/JTA