

Paris police: 18 freed, gunmen at large after store robbery

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Villeneuve-La-Garenne, France : A group of gunmen broke into a discount clothing store near Paris on Monday, trapping 18 people inside for hours before fleeing and prompting a manhunt throughout the area, police said.

All 18 people were safely evacuated from the Primark store in a shopping center in the town of Villeneuve-la-Garenne, according to a regional police official. She said police are now pursuing the assailants.

Police surrounded the sprawling shopping center and cordoned off the neighborhood, adjacent to the Seine River about 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of central Paris.

The assailants entered the store around 6:30 a.m. (0430 GMT; 12:30 a.m. EDT) Monday in what police believe was an attempted robbery, another police official said. Several people were already inside, primarily employees.

The officials weren't authorized to be publicly named.

Officers from a special police unit entered the store, and a few officers emerged later accompanying women reported to be store employees, according to images broadcast on BFM television.

There was no immediate sign of a political or other motive for the robbery.

The Paris region remains on high alert after Islamic extremists attacked a kosher supermarket and satirical newspaper offices in January, leaving 20 people dead including the attackers.

- AP