

FRANCE: Anti-Semitic acts up 69 percent in France in 2018, prime minister says

Anti-Semitic acts in France rose by 69 percent in the first nine months of 2018, Prime Minister Édouard Philippe said Friday, on the 80th anniversary of the infamous “Kristallnacht” attacks on Jews in Nazi Germany.

France 24 (09.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Dj2WmS> – Kristallnacht (also known as the Night of Broken Glass) refers to the smashed windows of Jewish shops and homes that happened in Nazi Germany during a heightened wave of violent anti-Jewish pogroms that took place on November 9-10, 1938. At least 91 Jewish people were killed and up to 30,000 men were rounded up and taken to concentration camps.

“Every aggression perpetrated against one of our citizens because they are Jewish echoes like the breaking of new crystal,” Prime Minister Édouard Philippe wrote in the statement on Facebook, referring to Kristallnacht.

“Why recall, in 2018, such a painful memory? Because we are very far from being finished with anti-Semitism,” he said, calling the number of acts “relentless”.

After a record high in 2015, anti-Semitic acts fell by 58 percent in 2016 and went down a further 7 percent last year.

France has the largest Jewish population in Europe and the third-largest Jewish population in the world. However, despite Jewish people making up less than 1 percent of the French population, they were the targets of nearly 40 percent of the violent acts in France classified as racially or religiously motivated in 2017.

And according to Phillippe, there has been a 69 percent rise in anti-Semitic acts in the first nine months of this year.

Günther Jikeli, a German historian at Indiana University who conducted a significant study of Muslim anti-Semitism in Europe, said the causes of this dramatic spike are difficult to identify. "The only two countries with reliable data on anti-Semitism are the UK and France," he said. "Rises in anti-Semitism often happen in correlated waves in the two countries, and last year there was a major wave in the UK."

'Unite and speak out'

"Anti-Semitism is often in the minds of many people, but we need to discover what triggers this into action," said Jikeli. "Sometimes people feel emboldened in the wake of another anti-Semitic act, like the Pittsburgh attack" on a Jewish synagogue that killed 11 people in October.

The murder of an 85-year-old Jewish woman in her home last spring left many in France aghast.

“The murder of Mireille Knoll in March shocked and outraged so many people, but maybe it also activated others. We know that anti-Semites feel encouraged to take action for many reasons. But, crucially, they can also be discouraged – and international leaders must unite and speak out.”

Philippe quoted Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel as saying that “the real danger, my son, is indifference”, pledging that the French government would not be indifferent.

The government plans to toughen rules on hate speech online next year, pressuring social media giants to do more to remove racist and anti-Semitic content.

Philippe said it would also “experiment with a network of investigators and magistrates who are specially trained in the fight against acts of hate”, which could be extended nationwide.

He added that from mid-November a national team would be mobilised to intervene in schools to support teachers dealing with anti-Semitism in their classrooms.

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