

French Jewish leader warns of growing animosity

CRIF head tells i24News antisemitism dressed up as anti-Zionism one of prevailing forms of anti Jewish bigotry

Refusing to brand France a hub of anti-Semitism, the head of the umbrella organization of French Jewish institutions told i24news the country is currently beset by a climate of animosity that is conducive to bigotry.



Citing Europe's economic hardships and the compulsion to find easy scapegoats as factors in the recent hike in anti-Semitic attitudes, the head of CRIF (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France) Roger Cukierman added that the "correlation between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism" is a new phenomenon, seeing as anti-Semitism has existed since time immemorial completely regardless of the situation in the Middle East.

"Describing oneself as anti-Zionist but not anti-Semitic is in vogue nowadays," Cukierman said.

France, Cukierman averred, is facing three distinct forms of anti-Semitism. First, there is the rise of the far right, including the growing public acceptance of National Front party; on the other hand, there is the anti-Semitism of the far left, originating with pro-Palestinian activists calling for a boycott of Israel. Cukierman this type as described as "anti-Semitism dressed up as anti-Zionism."

Finally, antisemitism prevails among young suburban immigrants, "predominantly Muslims," who are "eager to commit violence when they see a Jew a yarmulke."

Asserting that France was not an anti-Semitic country, he said there was "a climate in which it is not pleasant to live."

Cukierman nevertheless praised the work done by the French government officials, including Prime Minister Francois Hollande and Interior Minister Manuel Valls, in their efforts against anti-Semitism and in the dismantling of terrorist cells.



"Holland and Valls are friends of Israel," he said.

Asked about the current debates raging in Europe regarding circumcision and the prohibition of ritual slaughter in Poland, Cukierman bluntly said the trends reflected the rise of anti-Semitism across the continent.

"The right-wing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe has always been there and continues to grow," he said, adding that the Jews of France felt "targeted" by the reactions to the debate on circumcision, calling the proposal to ban the ancient custom "an attack on religious freedom."

On the issue of the expected release of Palestinian prisoners by Israel, Cukierman said he "shouldn't meddle in Israeli politics," adding that he saw no disadvantages if this release could help advance the negotiations, but said he understood the "opposition" to the measure. He also implored the Jews of the diaspora to show caution in discussions of Israeli politics.

Cukierman reiterated CRIF's support for the two-state solution which, according to him, is the only way to resolve the long-standing conflict.

"Unless we opt for two states, sooner or later the Jews will be a minority and Israel will lose its democratic status or will become an apartheid state."

Cukierman then addressed Israel's image around the world, saying it was "very bad," in particular in Europe. "The situation is more severe in Europe than in the rest of the world."