

Leaders reject Netanyahu calls for Jewish mass migration to Israel

Israeli prime minister's offers in wake of recent attacks blasted as politically motivated and disappointing by politicians and Jewish leaders

'Israel is the home of every Jew,' says Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu.

The Guardian, Feb. 16, 2015 Peter Beaumont in Jerusalem

European leaders have rejected calls by the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, for Jews to migrate en masse to Israel, pledging to ensure their safety at home.

Following shootings in Copenhagen at the weekend, Netanyahu echoed remarks he made after the Paris attacks on Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket in January, saying on Sunday: "This wave of terror attacks can be expected to continue, including antisemitic and murderous attacks. We say to the Jews, to our brothers and sisters, Israel is your home and that of every Jew. Israel is waiting for you with open arms."

But the French prime minister, Manuel Valls – who was speaking after several hundred Jewish headstones were vandalised at a cemetery in eastern France – said that he regretted Netanyahu's call, noting that the Israeli prime minister was "in the midst of a general election campaign".

The French president, François Hollande, insisted on Monday that he would not allow people to believe that "Jews no longer have a place in Europe" . "Jews have their place in Europe and, in particular, in France," he said.

The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, said her government would do everything possible to make sure Jewish sites were secure. "We are glad and thankful that there is Jewish life in Germany again," Merkel said in Berlin. "And we would like to continue living well together with the Jews who are in Germany today."

Analysis Is there really a Jewish exodus from western Europe?

There was a dramatic rise in the number of Jews leaving France for Israel last year, but what does a detailed look at the figures show?

Denmark's chief rabbi, Jair Melchior, said he was disappointed by Netanyahu's remarks. He said on Sunday: "Terror is not a reason to move to Israel.

"People from Denmark move to Israel because they love Israel, because of Zionism but not because of terrorism. If the way we deal with terror is to run somewhere else, we should all run to a deserted island."

His comments were echoed on Monday by Denmark's ambassador to Israel, Jesper Vahr. "The Danish Jews' solution is not to leave the country and, as our prime minister said, the attack on the Jewish community in Copenhagen is an attack on all the citizens of Denmark.

"I don't think the solution is to leave. We consider the Jewish community to be an integral part of Danish society, and we will do everything so that it feels safe. This is an attack on all the citizens of Denmark."

Rabbi Menachem Margolin, head of the European Jewish Association, also condemned Netanyahu's call for mass migration of European Jews to Israel as unacceptable, while calling on Europe's governments to improve security for Jewish schools, synagogues and other establishments.

"This is an unacceptable call. I criticised the Israeli government for this call after the Paris attack. I think that by saying 'come to Israel' you basically say: 'There is no way to protect you where you are, so please come to Israel.' People who live in Europe have the full right to live with full security."

Former Israeli president Shimon Peres also criticised calls for Europe's Jews to move to Israel as political. Speaking at an event organised by the Times of Israel, he said that while he "would like every Jew who wants to come to Israel to please come ... I don't want it to be a political position. Don't come to Israel because of a political position, but because you want to come and live in Israel. Israel must remain a land of hope and not a land of fear."