

Jewish cemetery desecrated hours after Israeli premier calls for mass migration of Jews

by [Elizabeth Bryant](#)

February 17, 2015

c. 2015 Religion News Service

PARIS (RNS) A call by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for European Jews to move to Israel has sparked anger from French authorities, but may also resonate among the region's embattled Jewish community, following the recent attacks in Copenhagen and the desecration of Jewish tombs in France.

Netanyahu made the invitation Sunday (February 15) at a weekly cabinet meeting, saying Jews deserved protection in every country. "But we say to Jews, to our brothers and sisters; Israel is your home," the prime minister said, according to a statement from his office. "We are preparing and calling for the absorption of mass immigration from Europe."

His remarks came hours after a gunman shot dead a Jewish security guard and wounded two police officers in front of a synagogue in Copenhagen. The attacks in the Danish capital, which also targeted a cultural center, are eerily similar to those in Paris last month, where the assailants targeted a satirical weekly and a kosher store.

On Sunday, French Jews received a further shock, with the desecration of several hundred tombs at a Jewish cemetery in Alsace. Police are reportedly questioning five minors, ages 12-17 years, who are suspected of having damaged the graves.

Jews left France in record numbers last year. Jewish authorities in some places say they have a backlog of applications for *aliyah*, the Hebrew term for immigration to Israel.

But French Prime Minister Manuel Valls criticized Netanyahu's remarks. "The fact (that) you're in an election campaign doesn't give you the right to say whatever you want," he said in a radio interview Monday, referring to Israel's general election on

March 17. "The place for Jews is France."

Visiting Copenhagen's main synagogue, where the shooting took place, Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt offered a similar message on Sunday.

"Our thoughts go to the whole of the Jewish community today," Thorning-Schmidt said. "They belong in Denmark. They are a strong part of our community and we will do everything we can to protect the Jewish community in our country."