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Islam in Europe

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Israel: French Muslim leaders promote understanding

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Combating anti-Semitic acts is a top priority among police officers in France, where anti-Semitic incidents in Paris have declined in the last couple of years, a senior Muslim police official in the French capital told The Jerusalem Post Wednesday.

"I don't think French people are anti-Semitic, but when there are tensions in Israel and in Palestine and in all the Middle East, we see [a rise in] anti-Semitism, especially with young people [who] are French but of Arab origin," said Muhammad Douhane, a police commander in the Paris District and a French Muslim of Algerian descent.

Douhane was one of 15 French Muslim leaders visiting Israel this week on a five-day tour organized by the Washington-based Project Interchange, an institute of the American Jewish Committee. The tour is designed to provide participants with a better understanding of Israel's political, historical and religious context.

Anti-Semitic sentiment increased in France - home to some 5 million Muslims, many of whom are North African immigrants - during the last intifada, but has since calmed down considerably, Douhane said.

"The situation was very difficult during the intifada," said Douhane, who is also a member of the national police syndicate, Synergie Officiers. "Now it's relatively quiet. I am not saying there is no longer anti-Semitism; I'm saying it has stabilized."

According to Douhane, anti-Semitism is more prevalent in the suburbs of Paris - where social problems such as crime, unemployment and Islamic radicalism are more severe - than in the city.

It was often youths between the ages of 12 and 18 who engaged in anti-Semitic acts, he said, because they identified with Palestinian youth during the intifada. These youths, he said, were motivated by images such as rock-throwing, which they saw on satellite television without

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