Anti-Semitic acts in France soared by 74% in 2018, interior minister says

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France said Monday night that the number of anti-Semitic acts in the country soared last year, and decried the “poison” of hate.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said that the total number of recorded anti-Semitic acts rose to 541 in 2018 from 311 in 2017.

He spoke in the Paris suburb of Sainte-Genevieve-du-Bois, where vandals chopped down trees planted in honor of a Jewish man tortured and killed in 2006.

The incident was the latest in a recent string of racist vandalism.

Castaner vowed that his government will fight anti-Semitism, calling it “an attack against hope.”

He did not link the rise to any specific groups.

A prominent French Jewish watchdog group said in December that widespread protests in the country over taxes were giving rise to anti-Semitic rhetoric.

The head of the National Bureau for Vigilance Against Antisemitism, or BNVCA, Sammy Ghozlan, said that “the ‘Yellow Vests’ movement has an anti-Semitic base that repeats conspiracy theories about Jews and power.”

Launched in November as a protest against a proposed rise in diesel and fuel taxes, the movement has expanded into an anti-government drive featuring violent riots that have shut down the French capital several times. Some protesters have been filmed carrying signs and chanting slogans describing French President Emmanuel Macron as a “whore of the Jews” and their “puppet.”

Such language “was present from the very beginning of the protests and persists,” Ghozlan said, although he added that it exists “on the margins” of the protests.

In the first 10 months of 2018, more than 2,300 French Jews reportedly made aliyah, or moved to Israel, while the number of those seeking information about aliyah from the foundation has reportedly increased.