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Protest against Jehovah's Witnesses seminar in central Israel turns violent

Hundreds show up to protest event, which is being held after a district court overturned the municipality's decision to block it.

Haaretz (02.05.2015) -

A demonstration against a Jehovah's Witnesses seminar being held in a municipal building turned violent in Ra'anana on Saturday.

Hundreds of protesters showed up to protest the event after a prolonged court struggle in which the municipality unsuccessfully attempted to cancel the event.

Two days earlier, a district court ruled that the objection to the event infringed on the right to freedom of religion and ritual and overturned the municipality's decision to cancel the event so as not to "hurt the feelings of the public."

Police kept the demonstrators away from the building with barriers. As the seminar participants entered, they both prayed and sang loudly in groups, with some of the crowd imploring them not to go in or jeering at them as they did. Others were more restrained, praying quietly at the fringes of the crowd.

"Any Jew who leaves Judaism becomes a Jew-killer!" one man shouted.

The crowds who came to protest were responding to posters that had been put up across town on Thursday and Friday by the city's chief rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, calling for an "outcry and protest" against the event, saying it was "incumbent on all residents" to show up for morning prayers outside the sports hall where the seminar was taking place.

After the prayer session, a crowd began to attempt to approach the building through a side entrance. They were warned away by police, but a small group persisted, and two men who refused to move and attacked the security detail trying to stop them were pushed to the ground, punched in the face and sprayed with pepper spray until they were handcuffed and led away.

The crowd grew larger and angrier, demanding that the two men be released, and a police vehicle was brought in to block the entrance to the building.

The situation was defused when Rabbi Peretz entered the building and secured the release of the two men, who raised their hands triumphantly as they exited.

Overtured

After the Ra'anana municipality cited "real fear" that the Jehovah's Witnesses sought to convince children and teenagers to convert from Judaism, the Lod District Court ruled Wednesday that the objection to the event infringed on the right to freedom of religion and ritual.

"A read between the lines shows that the change in the municipality's position stems from a protest by biased groups," Judge Varda Meroz wrote. "The municipality lets these groups sway its judgment while infringing on rights and exceeding the boundaries of reason."

Meroz ruled that the municipality had "violated the petitioner's constitutional right to freedom of religion and assembly, as well as the right to dignity, liberty and equality. These rights supersede the alleged offense to certain Ra'anana residents."

The municipality, she said, "hadn't proved the existence of extreme and unusual circumstances that could justify the infringement on the petitioner's constitutional rights."

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/.premium-1.654581>

Israeli city asks court to ok ban on Jehovah's Witnesses event

Jewish Telegraphic Agency (01.05.2015) -

<http://www.jta.org/2015/05/01/news-opinion/israel-middle-east/israeli-city-asks-court-to-ok-ban-on-jehovahs-witnesses-event> -The city of Ra'anana in Israel's center petitioned the country's high court to allow it to prevent two gatherings by some 1,000 followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses Christian sect.

The petition, filed Thursday, follows a district court's ruling against the municipality's ban on the events, one of which was scheduled to take place two weeks ago. The second event is slated for Saturday at a municipal event hall that the city rented out to the organizers of both events, the ynet.co.il news site [reported](#).

Activities in Israel by Jehovah's Witnesses, whose members engage in door-to-door preaching, have raised vocal opposition by Jewish groups and communities opposed to proselytizing.

The city of Ra'anana, a relatively-affluent suburb of Tel Aviv where one in every five residents is religious, cited the prospect of "serious disruption of the public's sensibilities and offense to their beliefs" in its petition to the high court to allow it to ban the events.

In the petition, the city also claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses concealed the exact nature of the events before striking the contractual agreement with the city for the use of its event hall. The city received \$4,800 after the contract was signed in January.

The sect's attorney petitioned to the district court to order the city to honor the contract, saying a ban was an attack on freedom of worship and a violation of the contract.

PA holds Israel responsible for torching of mosque and church

Middle East Monitor (27.02.2015) <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/17222-pa-holds-israel-responsible-for-torching-of-mosque-and-church> - The Palestinian presidency held the Israeli government responsible for settler attacks against Islamic and Christian places of worship in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Palestinian state-run news agency Wafa reported a statement issued by the Palestinian presidency as saying: "The Palestinian presidency condemns in the strongest terms the burning of the Al-Huda Mosque in the Jab'a village, southwest of Bethlehem, and Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem."

Jewish extremists wrote racist slogans against Muslims and Christians after [burning the mosque](#) and [the church](#).

Member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council and Secretary-General of the National Christian Assembly in the Holy Land, Dimitri Diliiani said the attack is the latest in an ongoing cycle of violations targeting Islamic and Christian holy sites in occupied Palestine.

"Netanyahu and his government are liable for every attack carried out against Islamic and Christian holy sites," Diliiani said, adding "those terrorist attacks are carried out by fanatics who receive political, financial and security support from the colonialist, extremist, Israeli government."

Statement condemning attacks on religious sites in West Bank and Jerusalem

World Council of Churches (27.02.2015)
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/statements/statement-condemning-attacks-on-religious-sites-in-west-bank-and-jerusalem/> - Recent attacks against a mosque in the West Bank (on 25 February) and a Christian centre in Jerusalem (on 26 February) appear to be part of the series of so-called "price-tag" attacks by extremist elements.

It is reported that a group of Jewish settlers stormed Al-Jaba'a village, near Bethlehem, and set fire to the Al-Huda Mosque, leaving anti-Arab slogans on its walls.

The following day, in another apparent arson attack, a building belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem was set on fire and vandalized with anti-Christian graffiti.

The World Council of Churches is grateful for the clear and unequivocal response by the President of Israel Reuven Rivlin in a phone call to Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III, in which he denounced the Jerusalem attack, calling it "a heinous crime" and affirming that "those responsible must be brought to justice." President Rivlin

acknowledged that the protection and conservation of holy sites was an obligation for Israel, as both a state and a society.

The Mayor of Jerusalem Nir Barkat said in a statement that the fire was set deliberately, and that "there is no room for such deplorable activity" in the city, which is deemed holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Israel's Foreign Ministry has also condemned the attack and "any action of religious intolerance of any kind."

As the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry has observed, such "religiously-motivated attacks and provocations by any party" risk further inflaming "an already volatile environment". Moreover, they further diminish hopes for peace with justice in the region.

The World Council of Churches therefore calls for swift and concrete measures to ensure those responsible for these and other similar attacks are in fact brought to justice, and further such attacks prevented.

Arson attack against Greek Orthodox seminary in Jerusalem

Asia News (27.02.2015) - Israeli police is investigating Jewish extremists to find the culprits of an arson attack against a Greek Orthodox seminary in Jerusalem.

According to police and fire department sources, arsonists poured flammable liquid into a bathroom through a window, lit it, and fled. No one was injured.

The Greek Orthodox seminary for the study of Christianity is next to Jaffa Gate, near Dormition Abbey.

Messages disparaging Jesus were found on the seminary's walls, including the phrase "the Redemption of Zion," which was also scrawled on the walls of a [Palestinian mosque in Jab'a](#) near Bethlehem in the West Bank torched overnight on Wednesday

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin expressed his sadness at the attack. Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat condemned the attack as "deplorable".

Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem responded by reiterating that "Our mission is to act to bring an end to such acts, in all areas of the Land of Israel."

Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat described the perpetrators of both incidents as "terrorists", blaming Israel's government for inciting the attacks by continuing its "illegal occupation and colonisation based on distorted religious claims."
