

Israel Gets Same-Sex Divorce Before Same-Sex Marriage

An Israeli court has awarded the country's first divorce to a gay couple, which experts called an ironic milestone since same-sex marriages cannot be legally conducted in the Jewish state.

A decision this week by a family court in the Tel Aviv area "determined that the marriage should be ended" between former Israeli lawmaker Uzi Even, 72, and his partner of 23 years, Amit Kama, 52, their lawyer, Judith Meisels, said on Tuesday.

Legal experts see the ruling as a precedent in the realm of **gay rights** in a country where conservative family traditions are strong and religious courts oversee ceremonies like marriages, divorces and burials.

While Israel's Interior Ministry still has the power to try and veto the decision, it would likely have to go court in order to do so, Meisels said.

A 2006 high court decision forced the same ministry, headed by an ultra-Orthodox cabinet member, to recognize **same-sex marriages** performed abroad and ordered the government to list a gay couple wed in Canada as married.

Same-sex marriages are performed in Israel, but they have no formal legal status.

"The irony is that while this is the beginning of a civil revolution, it's based on divorce rather than marriage," newly divorced Kama, a senior lecturer in communications in the Emek Yizrael College, told Reuters.

He and Even, both Israelis, married in Toronto in 2004, not long after Canada legalized same-sex marriage. They separated

last year, Kama said.

It took months to finalize a divorce as they could not meet Canada's residency requirements to have their marriage dissolved there. At the same time in Israel, rabbinical courts in charge of overseeing such proceedings threw out the case, Kama said.

By winning a ruling from a civil court, Kama and Even may have also set a precedent for Israeli heterosexual couples, who until now have had to have rabbis steeped in ancient ritual handle their divorces, legal experts say.

"This is the first time in Israeli history a couple of Jews are obtaining a divorce issued by an authority other than a rabbinical court, and I think there is significant potential here for straight couples" to do so as well, said Zvi Triger, deputy dean of the Haim Striks law school near Tel Aviv.

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