

Jerusalem Chief Rabbi Condemns Harassment of Christians in Jerusalem

Tuesday morning, Jerusalem's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar released a statement condemning harassment of Christian clerics in Jerusalem.

That statement was shared by one of Jerusalem's deputy mayors, Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, to social media.

Jerusalem is a city that sanctifies freedom of religion so when I received complaints about Christians being harassed in the old city we took action. Pleased the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem has sent out a public letter to clarify that this is against Jewish Law and should stop

–  Fleur Hassan-Nahoum (@FleurHassanN) June 5, 2023

Recently, Hassan-Nahoum has been outspoken against harassment of Christians by Orthodox activists in Jerusalem.

She posted to social media condemning the protests against the Pentecost 2023 prayer event last month, and sent an assistant to escort a Messianic leader and his wife as they filed a police report against some of the youth who shoved her and stomped on her feet.

Over the past several years, Christian clerics, primarily Catholic, Orthodox and Armenian priests and nuns, have complained of Jewish youth cursing them or spitting on them as they passed through city streets in Jerusalem.

While the incidents are not new, The Jerusalem Post had an article on the phenomenon in 2009, Christian clerics state

they have seen an increase in incidents since the coalition government came to power.

There were also several incidents of vandalism against churches or religious property in the Old City earlier this year.

Christian clerics have also long complained that the Israeli Police do very little when complaints are filed regarding the spitting incidents. This contrasts with the way police have handled the higher profile vandalism incidents, in which police got involved quickly and made arrests quickly.

According to Times of Israel, Hassan-Fleur has been leading the efforts stop harassment of Christians in Jerusalem.

Hassan-Nahoum, who handles the tourism and foreign relations for the city, called a meeting in December with city council members, police, and different representatives from the Old City of Jerusalem to deal with the attacks.

She told the Times, "We have become increasingly more aware of the situation."

Last week, the Axios reported that the Israeli Foreign Ministry will boycott an event focused on spitting attacks against Christians in Jerusalem.

According to that report, the Foreign Ministry does not approve of the title of the conference, which is "Why do (some) Jews spit on Gentiles?"

The conference is being organized by Yisca Harani, one of Israel's leading experts on Christianity. Harani has advised the Foreign Ministry in the past.

Harani told Axios that the Foreign Ministry contacted her and told her the title of the conference "is inappropriate," and for that reason the ministry will not attend.

Harani also said that several other government officials have not confirmed participation in the conference.

“It’s clear to me that this is a policy that comes from the top,” Harani told Axios.

A BBC report last month highlighted the connection between the lack of response and the new coalition government.

Bishop William Shomali of the Latin Patriarchate told the BBC that he does not believe the government has a policy of encouraging attacks, but that radical youth feel protected by having representation in the coalition government.

“I don’t believe that it is a strategy of the new government to attack churches,” he said. “But the young people who practice these offenses feel in some way protected because they have strong representatives in the government.”

Some church leaders accuse the government of getting involved only when politically necessary. They point out that while Hassan-Flour’s work has been welcome, it was another deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Arie King, who called for protests against Christians at the Pentecost 2023 event.

Hassan-Nahoum directly called out King in her interview with i24 News. She said that Evangelical Christians “are the main pro-Israel lobby today.” {eoa}

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