

Judge Orders Foster Care for Children of Reclusive Canadian Sect

An Ontario judge has ordered 13 children in a reclusive Orthodox Jewish sect into foster care in adjacent Quebec.

But the judge stayed the order for 30 days to give the sect time to appeal.

The children, who live in the Lev Tahor (Hebrew for "Pure Heart") community outside Chatham, Ont., about two hours southwest of Toronto, were ordered into temporary foster care by a Quebec court in November.

Authorities in Quebec, where sect members had lived for several years in the community, said they had evidence of neglect, psychological abuse, poor dental and physical health, and a substandard education.

But about 250 members fled Quebec to Ontario in November just before the order could be executed.

The 13 children belong to three families. The judge asked the media not to identify the children.

Even before Monday's ruling, a lawyer for Lev Tahor said he would appeal a decision to remove the children.

Last week, Quebec police, with the assistance of local officers, raided two homes in the Lev Tahor community in Ontario. Rabbi Nachman Helbrans, son of sect founder Shlomo Helbrans, said the search may have been an attempt to find evidence of illegal child marriages.

The sect's name is taken from a biblical passage: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within

me," Psalms 51:10.

A former sect member testified in Quebec that he had witnessed seven underage marriages.

The group has denied all charges and alleges it is the victim of a Zionist smear.

In a separate development, the case of two Lev Tahor children who were seized by Ontario social workers in December and later returned to their parents has been adjourned until April.

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