

Western Wall Rabbi Threatened Over Women's Prayer Group

Israeli police are investigating threats to hurt the rabbi in charge of Jerusalem's Western Wall if he does not allow a Jewish women's prayer group equal worship rights at the holy site, a police spokesman said on Monday.

Micky Rosenfeld said that Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch received the letters late last week. An Israeli television station showed one of the notes including a picture of a pistol in the lower right hand corner.

The Women of the Wall group has angered ultra-Orthodox Jews by wearing prayer shawls and reading from holy scriptures at the Western Wall, a revered remnant of the Biblical Jewish Temple.

Orthodox Jewish tradition reserves such rituals for men, and some more conservative rabbis have vowed to battle a plan devised by a former cabinet minister to try to accommodate the women's more liberal approach to prayer.

Women of the Wall denied any involvement in the letters to the rabbi, saying in a statement it was "saddened" by the remarks.

Last month threatening slogans were daubed on walls near the home of group member Peggy Cidor, one of which admonished her "your time is up."

The prayer issue is at the heart of a social struggle between Israel's secular majority and an ultra-Orthodox minority in a country where most religious ritual and institutions that oversee marriage, divorce and burial are controlled by Orthodox authorities.