

# Controversial Gay Parade OK'd for Jerusalem

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Religion News Service

JERUSALEM, Nov. 6 - Israel's attorney general said a controversial gay parade slated to take place in Jerusalem on Friday (Nov. 10) can proceed as scheduled, despite fears of violence from religious fundamentalists.

Attorney General Menachem Mazuz on Sunday rejected a request by the Israel Police to cancel the parade. For the past several weeks, fervently Orthodox Jews have set trash cans on fire at major intersections to protest the parade, which Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders have all tried to halt.

During a Nov. 1 demonstration attended by thousands of black-coated ultra-Orthodox men, prominent rabbis attributed Israel's security woes to the "promiscuous" lifestyle led by many Israelis.

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, who heads the fervently religious Eda Haredit rabbinical court in Jerusalem, told the protesters that Israel failed to score a strong victory against Hezbollah during the recent war in Lebanon "due to the obscenity and promiscuity in the Holy Land."

Top rabbinical authorities also signed a poster, hung in fervently religious neighborhoods, decrying "the evil mob seeking to defile the holy city of Jerusalem."

Prominent Muslim and Christian leaders have also called for the parade to be permanently banned from the city, which is holy to all three monotheistic faiths.

Noa Satath, general director of the Jerusalem Open House, an advocacy organization for Israeli and Palestinian gays and lesbians, hailed Mazuz's decision as "a victory of freedom of speech and democracy." Unlike the annual gay parade in Tel Aviv, Satath said "our parade will not be eccentric or outwardly sexual. It has never been our intention to offend the religious communities in town."

Gay and lesbian groups around the world have rushed to show solidarity with the Jerusalem Open House, the parade's organizer.

New York-based Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, which calls itself the world's largest gay

and lesbian synagogue, has launched a fundraising campaign to help the Open House defray its legal costs.

"We firmly believe that tolerance is holy and that (gay-lesbian) groups, whether they are in Jerusalem or Albany or Queens, should be able to march through the streets of their communities, and without fear of bodily harm," Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, the synagogue's spiritual leader, said in a Nov. 2 statement.