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Jerusalem's religious leaders threaten gay Pride participants

Muslims tell gays 'their lives will be in danger'

JERUSALEM, Israel — Jerusalem's Jewish, Christian and Islamic clergy — in a rare show of solidarity — are demanding that authorities block this summer's planned International Gay Pride Parade in the holy city.

Former Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, in a public statement, called the event "a disgrace."

Muslim officials announced that if gay Pride organizers do disregard the warnings and attempt to march in Jerusalem, "their lives will be in danger."



The clerics have called on Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski (pictured) to step in and order the parade and celebration cancelled.

Lupolianski is a member of the Hareidi, a fervently Orthodox community.

The group demanded he issue an executive order banning the parade.

In mid-January it was revealed that Lupolianski had been working behind the scenes to get police to deny a parade permit. But, publicly, the mayor says that he is legally not able to directly intervene.

Last summer Lupolianski called Jerusalem's Pride celebration "ugly, insulting,

offensive and provocative," but he did not move to have the parade banned. Jewish extremists condemned the mayor for not acting and he was given a special security detail for several days leading up to the event.

Even so, Pride celebrations were marred by ultra-conservative religious groups hurling rotten eggs as the parade marched down Ben Yehuda Mall.

World Pride, to be held Aug. 18-28, is expected to draw more than 100,000 gays and lesbians from around the world to the Holy City. The last World Pride was held in 2000 in Rome.

Jerusalem's Gay and Lesbian Center, which is organizing this year's World Pride, said that despite the controversy the event will "definitely take place."

The Center said it is not taking the threats too seriously, explaining that World Pride was held in Rome despite threats from the Vatican.

"This is a unique opportunity for Jerusalem in terms of its public image, and represents a huge opportunity for the city," said the executive director of Jerusalem's Gay and Lesbian Center, Hagai El-Ad.

Jerusalem held its first local gay parade only three years ago.

The event, which draws several thousand participants, has been the source of

repeated debate each year, with many religious city councilors and a significant number of city residents considering such an event inappropriate for a "holy" city.

When the first parade was held in the capital in 2002, former Jerusalem Mayor



Jerusalem's first gay pride, held in 2002.

Ehud Olmert withheld city funding for the event, after failing to convince organizers and participants to join Tel Aviv's parade, where a gay pride procession has been held for years with a much larger turnout.

The Jerusalem municipality was later ordered by the Supreme Court to pay the organizers \$40,000 for the annual event, in keeping with the amount the municipality contributed toward previous city marches.

Portions of this article previously appeared in 365gay.com and The Jerusalem Post.

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OSA goes after Charlotte Pride

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many of the members of the organization quoted the Bible and invoked the name of Jesus Christ, while telling the council that it was sponsoring immorality and sin.

"That is a low community standard," said David Benham, son of OSA organizer Flip Benham. "And we have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to this."

This latest effort by OSA mirrors earlier actions last fall when many of the same speakers appeared before the council voicing similar concerns. Since that time, city officials have said that the festival's organizers were protected by the First Amendment.

In an interview with Q-Notes last November, Charlotte Pride President Kris Conyers addressed OSA's concerns.

"I saw the photos when they were up at Pride," Conyers said. "They were just nude people standing around. Then I saw the photos she took of the pictures — the ones she had with her at the city council meeting. They were all so blurry it was impossible to tell what anyone was doing in the original [images]. They've taken this thing and completely blown it out of proportion and stretched it so far from the truth."

"That's what they've done. The truth isn't even present in their claims anymore."

Charlotte Pride Vice President Nathan Smith feels OSA is using the issues surrounding Pride to launch an attack against

Charlotte's LGBT community.

"They're just using us as a platform," says Smith. "That's what they're doing. OSA is attacking the entire LGBT community, not just Pride."

Despite the ongoing controversy, Smith doesn't think OSA's efforts will have much of an impact on Pride 2005.

"From the beginning both the chief of police and the city attorney said we didn't break any laws and that we're fine. We're meeting with Landscape Management to talk about logistics and the issues that OSA brought up. We're having to jump through a few more hoops than usual, but I personally don't feel anything is going to change, as far as denying access to the park."

Even though Smith is optimistic, he's cautious and doesn't want Charlotte Pride to get caught unprepared in the event any legal action is required. "We've reached out to MeckPAC and GLAAD to get everything in place in case we have to get the ball rolling," Smith explains. "But if they confirm the license as we hope they will, then there's no point in pursuing any further action."

According to an article in *The Charlotte Observer*, Mayor Pat McCrory said he has asked the city staff to review the topic before issuing a permit this year.

"I've asked our attorney to give us some guidance on what parameters we can give, to not just this festival but other festivals," he said.