

RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

March 24th, 2004

PRESS RELEASE

COURT REFUSES TO TAKE A STAND ON HOME DEMOLITIONS

This morning, Wednesday, March 24, 2004, Judge Rivka Feldman of the Magistrates Court in Jerusalem rejected the claim of "defense of justice" at the trial of the three defendants: Rabbi Arik Ascherman – Executive Director of "Rabbis for Human Rights", Shai Eliezer and Omer Ori, accused of opposing home demolitions.

Rabbi Arik Ascherman responded to the Judge's decision saying: "We are very disappointed with the decision handed down at this, the beginning of the month of Nissan in which we celebrate the exodus from Egyptian injustice. It saddens us to find out that we have a court of judgment, but not a court of justice at a time we should especially be sensitive to the situation of the stranger who lives among us: "because strangers you were in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19: 33-32).

Rabbi Ascherman said that more than 30 "administrative" home demolitions have taken place in Jerusalem since the beginning of the calendar year. The Or committee has already criticized the policy of home demolitions and has stated that the Israeli government limits the possibility of Arab citizens (and even more so of Palestinians) to build legally. There needs to be legal implementation to this concept, in order to stop this injustice immediately, which affects so many lives. It appears that the judge did not take into account the full meaning of the concept of civil disobedience. We intend to continue our struggle to persuade the court to acknowledge the real injustice of the policy of home demolitions. The whole world is watching this trial and we do not intend to lose".

Present at the court this morning, was Sufian Maswadeh whose home we were trying to protect when arrested, and Jacob Picheny, a representative of Rabbis for Human Rights supporters in North America.

For more details:

Rabbi Arik Ascherman 050-607034, 02-563-7731

Shai Eliezer 02-671-7570

Adv. Leah Tzemel 052-601602, 02-627-3373

Documents submitted to the court include:

- 1) Court Decision/Minutes
- 2) Expert testimony of planning expert Nati Maron on behalf of "Bimkom" and "ACRI"
- 3) Excerpts from the Or Commission Findings (English)
- 4) Expert testimony of planning expert Ayala Ronnel
- 5) Reports by B'Tselem (English), Ir Shalem, Urban Planner Sara Kaminiker(English)
- 6) Reports of Jerusalem Comptroller
- 7) Insider testimony of former Jerusalem Arab affairs advisor Amir Cheshin (English and Hebrew)
- 8) Testimonies of owners of the two demolished homes
- 9) Testimony of anonymous owner of demolished homes regarding offers to save his home in return for bribe or agreement to be an informer.
- 10) Testimony of Isawiyah Local Council Head Darwish Darwish
- 11) Rabbinic Opinion signed by RHR members
- 12) Rabbinic Support Letter signed by over 400 Diaspora Rabbis. (English)
- 13) Amicus Curiae Brief of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) and JCHR (Jerusalem Centre for Human Rights (English) and additional documents co written with the International Council of Jurists (English)
- 14) Affidavit of former Jerusalem City Council member Meir Margalit
- 15) Affidavit of the coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions Professor Jeff Halper

Happy are those who act justly, who do right at all times (Ps. 106:3)

BB

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