

Press Release

# Prosecution Requests Cancellation of the Conviction of Rabbi Arik Ascherman and Omer Uri

*Ascherman and Uri laid a symbolic new foundation for the home demolished in Isawiyah.*

*Judge Rebecca Freedman-Feldman convicted the two without referring to the policy of demolition.*

**Jerusalem, Israel. -- March 22, 2005** -- RHR today announced that RHR director Rabbi Arik Ascherman and Omer Uri were disappointed by Judge Feldman's decision to convict them without exercising her right to comment on the discrimination inherent in the policy of demolishing homes in East Jerusalem for lack of building permits. The two, accompanied by rabbis, activists and representatives of the media, left the court for Isawiyah, in East Jerusalem, and laid a foundation for the new home of the Da'ari family, a home RHR intends to build in place of the home demolished by the municipality in the very case Rabbi Ascherman was prosecuted for (Omer Uri participated in the defense of another home, in Beit Hanina). Surprisingly, the prosecution asked to cancel the conviction right away. After the cancellation the two will be required to do community service as punishment. Uri and Ascherman's lawyers are studying the decision, and the two will return to the court tomorrow after consulting. In Adv. Tzemel's opinion, the State is not interested in having a precedent for conviction of nonviolent resistance, on the eve of disengagement. By the ruins of the Da'ari family's home Rabbi Ascherman promised that the house will indeed be built, and added that justice will be measured here, and not in the courts. RHR calls upon the judicial system to take responsibility and stop the policy of demolition – so long as that policy is based on discrimination, mismanagement and corruption. Rabbi Ascherman prepared the following words for the possibility of sentencing hearings today:

"Without a doubt it is no simple matter to act boldly. But we are on the eve of Purim. I remind you of the words of the Scroll of Esther, 'Mordechai had this message delivered to Esther...if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter...And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just this moment.' (Esther 4:13-14) If you and others keep silent, relief and deliverance will come from another quarter. We drastically reduced the number of demolitions for almost three years and we will do it again. In the end justice will prevail. However, perhaps you have obtained your position as judge for just this moment. I believe that this is what you aspired to when you chose your profession and when you attained your judgeship. I am convinced that you attained your position believing that the law must be above our national conflicts and that discrimination such as that which we have laid out before you is unacceptable. I am sure you believe that, as it is in Biblical Hebrew, 'law' and 'justice' must be one and the same."

Ironically enough, we have found out today that three rooms were demolished in the home of the seven-member Siam family in Silwan, despite ongoing legal procedures.

## **About RHR**

**Rabbis for Human Rights** is the rabbinic voice of conscience in Israel, giving voice to the Jewish tradition of human rights. We promote justice and freedom, while campaigning against discrimination and inhumane conduct.

<http://www.rhr.israel.net>