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## **Minister of endowments to shut religious schools teaching extremism**

Hakim Almasmari

Yemen Post (12.05.2009) - Within the ongoing actions to curb terrorism in the country, the Ministry of Endowment and Guidance started a new field survey to review the current curricula at private schools.

The ministry plans to shut all schools, believed to breed and graduate terrorist elements, especially when there have been increased recruitment for youth in these schools.

In this regard, Minister of Endowments and Guidance Judge Hamoud Al-Hitar pointed out that his ministry is currently reviewing the position of all religious schools spread nationwide and estimated in 2005 to be 4,568 schools and religious centers. Some of which belong to the Ministry.

According to the plan set by the ministry, all reviews will be finished by the end of May and the committees are expected to study and revise the curricula of each school to see whether they are compatible with Islamic teachings.

Putting special emphasis on reviving the mosque's message, Al-Hitar mentioned that they have worked towards building the capacities of preachers in a way that helps spread moderate thinking and behavior.

Al-Hitar also revealed that they are working on a plan for creating a nationwide database for mosques and their preachers, orators and workers and started a plan for improving their living conditions. So far, about 6,000 mosque preachers have got benefit out of the monthly bonus paid by the ministry and amounts to YR 10,000 (\$50).

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## **Yemen's Jews uneasy as Muslim hostility grows**

By HAMZA HENDAWI

AP (26.04.2009) / HRWF (05.05.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - In this village in northern Yemen, where a kosher butcher slaughters chickens and the school bus carries young boys in side curls along a dirt track to their Hebrew studies, one of the oldest Jewish communities in the Arab world is fighting for its survival.

Yemen's Jews, here and elsewhere in the country, are thought to have roots dating back nearly 3,000 years to King Solomon. The community used to number 60,000 but shrank dramatically when most left for the newborn state of Israel.

Those remaining, variously estimated to number 250 to 400, are feeling new and sometimes violent pressure from Yemeni Muslims, lately inflamed by Israel's fierce offensive against Hamas militants in Gaza that cost over 1,000 Palestinian lives.

They face a Yemeni government that is ambivalent - publicly supportive but also lax in keeping its promises - in an Arab world where Islamic extremism and hostility to minorities are generally on the rise.

"There is hardly a mosque sermon that's free of bigotry. The government's own political rhetoric marginalizes the Jews, and civil society is too weak to protect them," says Mansour Hayel, a Muslim Yemeni and human rights activist who is an expert on Yemen's Jewry.

"The government's policies are to blame for the suffering of the Jews," he says.

The pressures have long existed. But an Associated Press reporter who traveled recently to the rarely visited north and interviewed Jews, Muslim tribal sheiks, rights activists and lawyers in Yemen's capital of San'a, heard complaints that the frequency of harassment - including a murder and the pelting of homes with rocks - has markedly increased.

The testimony was particularly striking because Jews in Arab lands often refrain from airing grievances, lest they antagonize the government and provoke Muslim militants.

Yemen's government says it is trying to stop the harassment. President Ali Abdullah Saleh has proposed that the 45 Jewish families in the farming communities of Kharif and the nearby town of Raydah in Omran province be moved 50 miles southeast to San'a, where they can be better protected. He has offered them free plots of land to build homes.

But the government has taken no concrete steps since presidential aides first spoke of the offer late last year.

For 18 Jewish families who moved to San'a in 2007 from Saada, another northern province, things have not gone well. They fled fighting between troops and rebels, during which some Jewish homes were ransacked and ancient books destroyed. Now they live in cramped apartments under tight guard, entirely dependent on small government handouts.

The families in Kharif and Raydah say they too would like to leave, but only if compensated for property they leave behind.

Migrating to Israel or the U.S. is a possibility, and the government says it will not stop anyone from leaving. But Jews here don't discuss that option publicly, because in Yemen, Israel is anathema and America is deeply distrusted.

At least one outside group has tried to bring the Yemeni Jews out, said an Israeli official in Jerusalem, speaking on condition of anonymity because the subject is highly sensitive. But many are loath to become refugees and lose all they have, the official said.

"It is in the interest of the government for the Jews to stay," said Sheik Mohammed Nagi al-Shayef, a wealthy tribal leader and the Yemeni president's point man on Jewish affairs. "It will be a disgrace for the government if they leave."

But that view appears far from universal.

In Kharif, Yahya Yaish Al-Qedeimi has a long list of complaints about how he and his fellow Jews are treated: harassment in the market, stones thrown at the school bus, insults from villagers walking past his house.

When Saddam Hussein was executed, "they pelted our house with rocks," he said.

Al-Qedeimi is a rabbi's son in a village that no longer has a rabbi. He is uncertain about the future but fears that if the community moves to the capital it will be grouped in one place and become a tempting target for militants.

He says younger members of the community are pressuring the elders to leave Yemen altogether.

Tensions rise each time Israel conducts military operations in Gaza or the West Bank, he says.

"We complain to the police about the more serious incidents, but they never investigate," Al-Qedeimi said. "Our fears have grown after Moshe's killing. The lenient sentence against his killer will encourage others to do the same."

By "Moshe" he means Moshe Yaish Youssef Nahari, who was gunned down on a December day near his home in Raydah. Compounding the Jews' shock and dread, the self-confessed killer was spared the death penalty, though it's usually mandatory in such cases.

Nahari, a father of nine in his early 30s, taught Hebrew to the children, and was also in charge of slaughtering sheep and poultry according to kosher laws.

He had Jewish and Muslim friends and occasionally invited them to his home to chew qat, the mildly narcotic leaf that is a Yemeni staple and symbol of social togetherness. He also was an active campaigner for Yemen's president.

The killer was Abdul-Aziz Yehia Hamoud al-Abdi, a former air force pilot. He was convicted of murder in the first degree, but the judge ruled him mentally unfit, sent him to a mental institution and ordered his clan to pay the victim's family 5.5 million riyals (\$27,500).

Nahari's family has refused to accept the money and is appealing the March 2 sentence.

It was al-Abdi's second murder. The 38-year-old Muslim had killed his wife five years earlier but the case never reached a court because tribal leaders protected him, saying he suffered from depression.

According to witnesses cited by Khaled al-Anasi, the Nahari family's Muslim lawyer, al-Abdi confronted Nahari shouting, "You, Jew, convert to Islam so your life is safe." Nahari said something to the effect of "mind your own business" and al-Abdi pumped 11 bullets from a Kalashnikov assault rifle into the victim, killing him, the witness statements said.

Al-Anasi said the judge, having convicted al-Abdi of first-degree murder, was obliged to sentence him to life imprisonment or death. He also complained that the trial was held in Omran province, with hundreds of al-Abdi's fellow tribesmen frequently disrupting the proceedings and intimidating the judge and Nahari's family.

"I used to like living in Raydah, now I just want to leave," said 12-year-old Sasson, the oldest of the murdered man's four boys.

Sasson was taught Hebrew and religion by his late father. He says his education has been disrupted by his father's death and that he may travel abroad to study. Four of his aunts are married and settled in Israel, the family says.

"I will be back when I finish my studies," said Sasson, a soft-spoken boy who wore a dark suit, it being the day before Passover, the holiday that celebrates the Jews' exodus from slavery in ancient Egypt.

The history of Jews in the Arab world is a narrative of discrimination and persecution, but also some prosperity. The hundreds of thousands who arrived after their expulsion from 15th century Spain mostly lived in ghettos with limited rights, although some professionals prospered.

Most migrated to Israel in the 1950s. The small numbers who stayed behind lived at the mercy of nationalist governments in places like Iraq and Egypt.

For Jews, Yemen has more symbolic significance than almost any place in the Arab world. Historians believe the first Jews arrived here in around 900 B.C. as part of King Solomon's trading network. Evidence of a Jewish presence in Yemen can be traced back to the 3rd century A.D.

The Jews of today's Yemen zealously guard their customs. Men wear skull caps, women black robes and veils. Children must learn Hebrew and Torah. Holy days are celebrated in bare makeshift synagogues attached to the homes of community elders. On a recent day, two men bumped along a dirt track on a motorcycle near Kharif, side curls blowing horizontal in the wind.

In the dusty courtyard of al-Qedeimi's mud-brick home, Jewish men stood chatting, while a man murmured prayers as he slaughtered a chicken.

Al-Qedeimi is a car repairman and traditional healer who says he made lifelong Muslim friends at the government school he attended.

Because of the harassment, young Jews no longer can go to that school and make such friends, he said.

Receiving visitors in a room with Hebrew writings on the wall, he comes back to his friend Nahari's murder.

"If the sentence had been appropriately strong, the Jews would have stayed quiet and dropped any plans to leave for San'a. Most of us want to stay, but we are worried about our lives," he said.

In the capital, the 18 families evacuated by the government from Saada in 2007 celebrated Passover. In the apartment block assigned to them by the government, the boys were wearing suits so new they still showed the designer labels on the sleeves. Girls with dark hair and eyes wore new white dresses.

The government, eager to show benevolence toward the uprooted Jews, let Yemeni reporters and TV crews record the celebrations. Plainclothes security men listened to every word spoken by Yahya Youssef Moussa, the families' rabbi.

Moussa, while the cameras are on, lavishly praised the president as a "loving father" and a leader. "We are ready to sacrifice our lives for him," he said.

Compared with the fighting they fled, "This is a place where we feel completely safe," said Moussa. "We can never return."

When the cameras were off, however, Moussa had grievances to air: The government wasn't giving the community money to rent stores and buy craftsmen's tools; the evacuees hadn't been compensated for property they left behind in Saada; they were crammed into six small apartments, sometimes 18 to an apartment.

Many want their young men to travel to the U.S. or Europe for study, but insist they should return after graduation.

Physical safety is their overriding concern.

"If we are ever to move from here," the rabbi said, "we want homes with high walls and armed guards."

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