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HAARETZ

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Gag order lifted: Police arrest suspects in Jewish-Arab school arson

Suspects are thought to be behind a racially-motivated attack on a Jerusalem school.

By Nir Hasson

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Firefighters inspect a burned classroom at the Max Rayne Hand in Hand Jerusalem School, Nov. 29, 2014. Photo by Tali Meir

The Petah Tikva District Court lifted a gag order Sunday afternoon on the arrest of suspects in the arson of a Jewish-Arab bilingual school in Jerusalem.

The suspects were arrested about a week ago. A gag order on the number of suspects and details of the investigation remains in place.

The court acceded to a request by the police and Shin Bet security service that the suspects be prevented from meeting with their legal representatives.

The police and Shin Bet requested that the suspects be remanded for eight days but their remand was extended only until Thursday.

On November 29, two first-grade classrooms and a playground were [set alight](#) at the Max Rayne Hand in Hand Jerusalem School and hateful phrases were sprayed on a building, reading "Kahane was right" and "There's no coexisting with cancer." The fires were extinguished by first responders.

One of the classrooms was completely burned. The arsonists also piled up Hebrew and Arabic schoolbooks, poured flammable liquid on them and set them alight.

Itamar Ben Gvir, the suspects' attorney, said after the arrests were announced that the rights of his clients were being denied and that the order preventing them from meeting their attorneys was something "that should concern every democratic country."

"Where is the Association for Civil Rights in Israel?" Ben Gvir asked.

On Monday, the Jerusalem District Court is due to discuss a petition for the suspects to be allowed to meet with their lawyers. The petition was submitted by attorney Avichai Hajbi, who represents the suspects together with Ben Gvir.

Itamar Ben Gvir is a well-known right-wing activist and former member of Meir Kahane's banned Kach movement. He and Baruch Marzel are regarded as the current leaders of Kach, which remains illegal in Israel. He was Knesset aide to another former Kach member, Michael Ben-Ari, when the latter represented the Jewish National Front in the Knesset.

The Jerusalem school is the country's largest Jewish-Arab institution. It has been co-run by a Jewish and an Arab principal since its founding in 1998 by the Hand in Hand non-governmental organization.

Over the past few months the school has repeatedly been targeted by right-wing vandals, who have sprayed racist graffiti against Arabs on its walls.

Two teenage youths were detained two days after the arson for hanging racist signs on the school's fence. The signs included "The Arabs and cancer" and "Kahane was right."