

Israel's Leading Daily Newspaper. Established 1919

HAARETZ

English Edition

Suspected arson attack damages Jerusalem's Jewish-Arab school

Assailants spray 'There's no coexisting with cancer' wall of the country's largest bilingual school; Mayor Barkat: We will not allow pyromaniacs to disrupt our lives.

By Nir Hasson, Jonathan Lis and Yarden Skop

+ reddit this!



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

A fire caused damage to Jerusalem's [Hebrew-Arabic bilingual school](#) on Saturday evening. Police and fire services suspect arson as hateful phrases were also sprayed on the building, reading "Kahane was right" and "There's no coexisting with cancer."

The fire broke out at the playground in the school, and was extinguished by emergency crews.

The Max Rayne Hand in Hand 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 was repeatedly targeted by right-wing vandals, who have sprayed racist graffiti against Arabs on its walls.

"Even if they manage to dirty the school's walls, they will not manage to bring down our enterprise [of civil cooperation]," Hand in Hand Executive Director Shuli Dichter said in a statement. "In addition to denouncing [these actions] expressing support, we invite the entire Israeli public to join us in the building of Jewish-Arab civil partnership in Israel. We will continue to develop our educational and social project, where every day 1,200 students come to study, some 200 teachers come to teach, and in which thousands of family members are involved."

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat condemned the incident: "We will not allow pyromaniacs and criminals who take the law into their own hands to disrupt our daily lives," he said. Barkat added: "We will continue to denounce the extremists and do whatever it takes to restore the quiet to Jerusalem." He said he has spoken to the Jerusalem Police chief "whose top priority is the investigation and the security of Jerusalem's children."

A number of Knesset members spoke out against the attack.

Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni is scheduled to visit the school Sunday, saying, "we will not let extremists set fire to the coexistence that still exists."

Education Minister Shay Piron said that the incident was "a violent, criminal and despicable incident... aimed at hurting and undermining Israel's democratic foundations. The fact that it was an arson attack on an educational facility that advocates coexistence severely undermines the fabric of relations between Jews and Arabs. I urge the Israel Police to act immediately and bring to justice these despicable vile criminals."