

Allegations of graver sexual abuse surface on eve of rabbi's verdict

In 2012 interview, Ramat Gan's chief rabbi said Mordechai Elon committed acts far worse than those brought before the court

BY MITCH GINSBURG | August 6, 2013, 10:44 am |

One day before the verdict in a sexual assault case against Rabbi Mordechai Elon, one of the most prominent modern Orthodox rabbis of his generation in Israel, a website serving the religious community released a dated recording in which another senior rabbi claimed that the charges brought before the court omitted far graver acts committed by Elon.

"The victims don't want to reveal what happened; their wounds are bleeding and they don't want to stand before a cross examination and be revealed," said Rabbi Yaakov Ariel of the acts allegedly committed by Elon. Some of those acts, he said, were "whales" when compared to the charges brought before the court, which he described as "small fish."

Elon was charged in a Jerusalem Magistrate's Court with two counts of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

In February one of the alleged victims refused to take the stand and testify against his former teacher, leaving a single complainant remaining and placing the reputation of the religious group that brought the alleged misconduct to light in doubt.

Ariel is a prominent member of the group, Forum Takana, which was founded in 2003 and has attempted to police its own community on matters relating to sexual misconduct.

Although the 30-member forum, consisting of leading rabbis and several female religious leaders, has received hundreds of phone calls over the past decade and dealt with dozens of cases, the most prominent by far has been the case of Elon — the son of a Supreme Court justice who rose to the position of yeshiva head at 28 and gathered around him an ever-widening circle of followers on account of his singular charisma and the insight of his learning.

In July 2005, the forum, originally founded in order to address claims from women who said they had been sexually assaulted and “found themselves maligned,” summoned Elon and confronted him with the charges filed by two men, both of whom said they had been sexually harassed by the rabbi.

According to the Takana website, Elon, when confronted with the charges, “declared that he had completely overcome his problem, that the complaint referred to an old incident and that there were no other additional cases.”

One year later, the committee heard another complaint, “more serious than the first.” Elon was forced from his post as head of Yeshivat Hakotel and, although he left Jerusalem and largely receded from view, the forum finally made the accusations public, because, the group wrote, “we fear we have no other way to protect the public from possible further injury.”

Ariel said in the recording that Elon had admitted to committing a series of indecent acts with young students. “The bottom line is that he admitted to the facts,” Ariel said.

“If we don’t stop these acts there will be more victims. The trial doesn’t interest me; I won’t be happy if he’s found guilty and I won’t cry if he’s exonerated.”

Speaking to Army Radio on Tuesday morning, Ariel called the publication of the recording [on the website Kippa](#) and subsequent articles “a travesty” and said he had intended for the interview to be used only in case it became necessary to further deter Elon and not in order to sway the upcoming verdict.

In the recording, which was made in 2012, Ariel likened those who still cling to Elon to the followers of the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi. “The phenomenon is similar to Sabbateanism,” he said. “Even when Sabbatai Zevi converted to Islam, his followers didn’t believe it” and were not dissuaded from supporting him.