

'Forest rapist' sentenced to 18 years

By Dan Izenberg

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Jerusalem District Court yesterday sentenced Ami Edri to 18 years in jail on charges including the kidnapping and attempted rape of eight women aged 16 to 22 during a three-month period in the summer of 1998.

It was one of the harshest sentences ever issued for a non-domestic sexual crime. Edri's lawyer, Ya'acov Rubin, said he would appeal to the Supreme Court to reduce the prison term.

Edri became known as the "forest rapist" because he offered lifts to unsuspecting women, almost all of them religious, told them he was driving in the direction they wanted to go, and then took them to nearby woods on false pretexts, where he attacked them physically and sexually.

Edri, who arrived in court with manacles on his legs, hid his face from photographers, then sat stooped on a chair with his eyes on the floor as Judge Ya'acov Zemah read out a detailed description of each of his sexual assaults.

"The accused turned the kidnapping of young women in order to perpetrate terrible sexual attacks upon them into a systematic pattern of behavior," he said. "The charges paint a picture of a 'hunt' which the accused carried out at night, usually around midnight, when the streets were deserted and traffic on the highway was light. This was the time when he would cruise around and choose his victims for sexual abuse. He caught them in his net by dissimulation, deceit, and enticement.

"Then came the hell: the kidnapping, late at night, in a deserted and dark forest, when the accused suddenly turns into a wild animal. He hits them, slaps them, kicks their heads, pushes them, tears their clothes off, and threatens them with violence or murder if they don't give in to his distorted lust."

Zemah said that mitigating factors which Rubin, Edri's brothers, and other well-wishers raised on the accused's behalf, including the fact that this was his first offense, that he had done good deeds for others throughout his life, and that he had suffered in his childhood, were not enough to offset his criminal acts.

"All his good past pales in comparison to the terrible deeds that he perpetrated on eight innocent young women," he wrote. "The accused was revealed as a vicious rapist, cold-blooded and lacking a conscience."

Zemah added, however, that he had taken into consideration the fact that Edri had confessed to his crimes, thus sparing his victims, who were shattered by their experiences, from having to testify in public.

According to the Justice Ministry, only one man convicted of rape outside the family has been given a longer sentence than Edri. The man, whose name was not given, was sentenced to 21 years in jail. In that case, however, the man had a criminal past and had threatened his victims with a knife. Another famous rapist, the "athletic rapist," was sentenced to 14 years in

jail, but attacked fewer victims than Edri.

The court gave Rubin 45 days to appeal. Rubin told reporters after sentencing that "the punishment is very harsh and deviates in an extreme way from the sentences handed out by the Supreme Court. I think that in this case, involving someone who is a first-time offender, even if the offenses are serious ones, Edri ought to have gotten some of his jail sentence suspended, and not to have been imprisoned for such a long time."