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Alleged Cult Leaders Deny Forcing Women to Work as Prostitutes

Court extends remand of the two men suspected of forcing women to have sex with customers in order 'to save the Jewish people and expedite the redemption.'

[Yair Ettinger](#) | Sep 12, 2014 2:24 AM



David Dvash of Kiryat Arba, one of two suspected cult leaders whose lawyer claims he merely led an "alternative lifestyle."

Credit: Moti1980

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-

Two men, who were arrested earlier this week on suspicion of leading a cult that forced women to work as prostitutes and held

them in bondage, were remanded into custody for seven more days by a Jerusalem court on Thursday.

The suspects, David Dvash from the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba and Gad Zarad from Ashkelon, are suspected of forcing the women to have sex with non-Jewish men “to save the Jewish people and expedite the redemption,” police said. Six other suspects were also arrested in the case, two of them women.

The police representative told the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court on Thursday that additional complainants had come forth to testify against the group this week. Consequently, Zarad is now suspected of “serious offenses” against minors as well, he said.

Dvash and Zarad denied the allegations against them. Their lawyers had filed an insanity plea for them on Sunday. On Thursday the judge sent the two for psychiatric observation.

The suspects’ lawyers said their clients confirm taking part in group sex, but this was done under agreement, as part of “open relationships.”

Dvash’s attorney Alon Davidov said the two were “adults with alternative lifestyles, perhaps indigestible to the conservative guys in the police, but they didn’t perpetrate all the serious offenses the [police] are trying to pin on them.”

Zarad’s attorney David Barhum said his client “admitted he had group sex but denies the use of any coercion, exploitation or abuse.”

Barhum said after the court session that Zarad's acts were not motivated by religious or nationalist ideology. Davidov said Dvash was "convinced everything he did was to help the people of Israel... to bring it closer to redemption...it all comes from his deep faith."

He stressed repeatedly that his client had committed no criminal offense and the case consisted, at most, of moral offenses.

The attorneys denied the existence of a cult and said the case is based on the testimony of one complainant, Zarad's former partner.

The police asked Judge Yaron Mientkavich to extend the suspects' custody by 10 days. The judge said the suspicions were "substantiated to a satisfactory degree for today's session" but extended the custody by seven days only, urging the police to advance the investigation significantly.

The suspects were apprehended after a four-month undercover investigation following a complaint by a woman who said the cult was exploiting its female recruits.

Among the suspects are Dvash's 40-year-old wife and a 39-year-old woman from Jerusalem. All but the two main suspects have been released.

Dvash, 60, a well-known figure in the settlements, is married to two women and father to 15 children by both wives. Zarad, 47, is suspected of pimping the women and supplying the drugs with which the group controlled the women.

The suspected cult leaders allegedly took money from the men to have sex with the women and tried to pressure the women to become Orthodox through their sexual relations with the non-Jewish men.

The clients included, among others, Palestinians from the West Bank and foreign workers living in Tel Aviv.



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