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Jewish Leaders in Israel Decry Attack on Monastery

Vandalism Denounced as 'Criminal Act'

by Junno Arocho

LATROUN, Israel, SEPT. 11, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Political and religious leaders in Israel have conveyed outrage over last week's desecration of a local Trappist monastery.

Vandals struck in the early hours of last Tuesday morning, setting fire to the main entrance of the Latroun Trappist Monastery and spray painting phrases ridiculing Jesus, along with the names of several West Bank outposts that were recently evicted by the Israeli government. Authorities believe that it was a price tag attack, which is the name given for vandalism or acts of violence aimed usually at Israeli security forces or Palestinians. Usually carried out by radical Israeli Jewish settlers, attackers will strike at a site, usually Christian or Muslim, as a price for being evicted from their settlements.

A group of 50 rabbis and leading Jewish scholars signed a statement written by Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute in Jerusalem, condemning the vandalism.

Dr. Goshen-Gottstein presented the message after a Sunday Mass at the Latroun monastery presided by the abbot, Fr. René Hascoët. The letter expressed disdain for the attack on the Trappist monastery. We feel deeply sorry that you were treated with such disrespect by others who are members of our faith community, the statement read.

In our understanding, the creation of humanity in God's image is the great motif of the Torah. We believe the Torah mandates full respect for the infinite value, equality and uniqueness of every human life, for we are all created in the image of God. There is no place for hatred or bigotry towards those whose religious commitment is different from our own.

Responding to the statement, Fr. René expressed his gratitude for the support of the local Jewish community.

We are truly surprised and impressed by the chain of solidarity and friendship which has formed around us, following this act. People of all religions and all walks of life have shown us their closeness and their rejection for this act, he said.

We can only thank God for all these friends who surround us and who have made themselves known on this occasion.

Political leaders have also expressed outrage over the attack. In a press conference the day of the attack, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the desecration of the monastery, calling it a criminal act."

"Religious freedom and worship are two of the most basic institutions in Israel," the prime minister asserted.

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The Israeli news agency Ynet News reported that several government representatives have visited the monastery following the vandalism, including Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, Danny Ayalon. Addressing the abbot of the Latroun monastery, Ayalon expressed his solidarity with the monks. In the name of the government of Israel and the people of Israel, I came here to shake your hand, Ayalon said to Fr. Rene.

This act of terrorism against you harms not only the people of the monastery but also the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

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