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1/2

Amid Krakow shul row, Polish chief rabbi says: 'Open doors, allow Jews to pray'

Jewish worshippers stopped from entering the Izaak Synagogue after its rent was hiked up by 1,000 percent, leading to a dispute now subject to legal proceedings

By JEWISH NEWS REPORTER
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Armed guards dressed in balaclavas descended on a Krakow synagogue on Monday morning, turfing worshippers out onto the street and chaining the entrance.

Jews were left to pray outside the Chabad-run Izaak Synagogue, one of seven in the Polish city owned by the Jewish Religious Community of Krakow (Gmina), which is run by members of the same family.

Worshippers said the synagogue's rent had been hiked by 1,000 percent, and that the dispute was currently subject to legal proceedings.





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2/2

One resident said: “The sight of armed and masked guards blocking the entrance to the shul was deeply upsetting... A 90-year-old Holocaust survivor, Dov Landau, was in tears. He said it reminded him of the horrors he experienced 80 years ago.”

The dispute recently led to water and electricity to the synagogue being turned off, prompting the shul’s Rabbi Eliezer Gurary to buy a generator.

In a message to Gmina president Tadeusz Jakubowicz, Poland’s Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich chastised the family for using Jewish communal property “as private properties, only concerned with maximising profit”.

He said: “The Izaak Shul is fulfilling the responsibility of our Jewish community in Kraków. This should be supported and applauded. Instead, the electricity was cut off, then the water was cut off [then] masked guards were posted to prevent Jews from attending the morning minyan.

“No matter what the nature of the dispute is, I call upon the Gmina to fulfil the most elemental responsibility of every Jewish community: open the doors of the synagogue and allow Jews to pray to God.”

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, President of the Conference of European Rabbis reacted to the row, saying: “The synagogue is the heartbeat of any Jewish community, for it to be used as weapon in an internal dispute, as it is in Krakow, is simply soul destroying. The images of masked guards standing outside a synagogue belong in a different era.”

We urge all parties to follow the call of Chief Rabbi Schudrich and fulfil the most basic responsibility of every Jewish community –open the doors of the synagogue and allow Jews to pray.”

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