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Worshippers are kept out of synagogue by armed guards

BY HAGAY HACOHEN

BURLY armed guards — their faces masked by balaclavas — were placed outside a synagogue this week after a split between two groups of worshippers grew ugly.

The decision to lock the shut gates and call in security was taken by officials of the Jewish community in Krakow.

It followed a storm between local Jews and Chabad activists at the Polish city's Izaak Synagogue.

The guards barred any worshippers from entering on Monday.

The synagogue is owned by the community and rented by Chabad.

Conflict arose when the community decided to charge more rent. According to Rabbi Avf Baumol the increase was 1,000 per cent, his blog reported.

Community officials also turned off the water and electric power, hoping the Chabad congregation would leave, *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported.

"The Jewish community is cheating the real Jews of Krakow," said 93-year-old Holocaust survivor and Krakow-born Edward Mosberg.

Calling them "crooks," he called on the Polish government to investigate how the Jewish community makes such decisions. "Throwing Jews out of a synagogue is something that should never happen," he said, "especially by other Jews."

The head of the Krakow Jewish community centre, Jonathan Ornstein, said if non-Jews would have locked a Jewish house of prayer, "the entire Jewish world would be unified in protest."

He added that the Jewish world "should now be similarly horrified that armed masked guards barred Jews from prayer."

Chabad, which operates all over the world, is not a part of the official Jewish community of Poland.

The Chief Rabbi of Poland,



LOCKED OUT: Worshippers are forced to pray outside the synagogue gates

Michael Schudrich, said that the "essential responsibility of every Jewish community is to protect, enhance, and deepen Jewish life".

Noting that the Izaak Syna-

gogue is the "one place in Krakow" with a daily prayer service, Rabbi Schudrich said that Jewish services and learning should be "supported and applaud-

ed" as opposed to having the water and power shut down.

The responsibility of a Jewish community, he warned, is to use assets it received from the past "to enrich Jewish life and not to treat them as private properties".

He called on the Jewish community to open the gates of the Izaak Synagogue again and "allow Jews to pray to God".

Rabbi Schudrich praised Rabbi Eliezer Gurary, the Chabad movement's emissary to Poland, and Rabbi Avf Baumol, a regular at Izaak Synagogue, for their "Torah learning and Jewish values".

"Thanks to them and to many others, the Izaak Shul is fulfilling the responsibility of our Jewish community in Krakow," the Chief Rabbi added.

"This should be supported and applauded. Instead, the electricity was cut off and then the water was cut off. And armed masked guards were posted to prevent Jews from attending the morning minyan."

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, which has clashed frequently with Chabad, called the synagogue's closure "immoral and opposed to Jewish tradition".

Tensions sparked over Chabad 'outsiders'

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ

WHEN guards working for the Jewish community of Krakow blocked the entrance to a Chabad-run synagogue, it was the culmination of a series of clashes between the local establishment and the chassidic outreach movement.

That scene also echoed numerous previous clashes — some physical — across Europe.

They are extreme examples of tensions that pit relatively small Jewish community associations concerned with preserving traditions against what they perceive as ideologically-driven outsiders.

The local "communities" — that is, officially sanctioned governing bodies that represent Jewish interests — often

accuse Chabad of displaying little sensitivity, patience and diplomatic skills in dealing with native co-religionists.

Chabad denies the claim, saying the young, charismatic rabbi-and-wife teams they send to establish synagogues and Jewish centres across Europe are providing essential services for Jewish populations depleted by time and tragedy.

It says it opens doors to Judaism for Jews of all backgrounds, despite its adherence to strict Orthodox practices.

Ironically, this week's Krakow clash at the Chabad-run Izaak Synagogue comes amid growing co-operation between

Chabad figures and established Jewish communities across Europe.

This rapprochement in Holland, France, Germany, Russia and beyond follows intense friction in the 1990s and 2000s over control and status in several of those communities.

In France, Chabad rabbis effectively run the Jewish education system where many non-Chabad communal leaders send their children, raising its institutions to unprecedented excellence.

And in Russia, where Chabad and non-Chabad leaders clashed openly 15 years ago, they signed a co-operation agreement two years ago in which they formally buried the hatchet.

Peace plan snub for Palestinian 'right of return'

THE long-awaited Middle East peace plan will call on Arab countries to take in Palestinian refugees.

At present, the Palestinian demand — rejected by Israel — is for a "right of return" for millions of Palestinians to today's Israel.

The new American thinking was leaked to reporters by Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law.

He told them that the next steps in his peace plan would "probably" be revealed next week.

Promising a "pragmatic" solution, Kushner said that Jewish refugees from 1948 were looked after, but Arab states "have not absorbed a lot" of Palestinian refugees.

His peace plan will now "seek to better integrate refugees inside Arab countries".

While discussing the status of Palestinian refugees who fled or were forced out of Israel when the Jewish state was established in 1948, as well as their descendants, Kushner noted that a similar number of Jews fled or were expelled from Arab countries.

He said that the decision of the Palestinian leadership to boycott last week's economic workshop in Bahrain — aimed at discussing ways of

boosting the Palestinian economy in the event of a peace deal with Israel — had been "hysterical and erratic and not terribly constructive".

"The Palestinian leadership has made a strategic mistake by not engaging on this," he added.

"They look very foolish for trying to fight against this."

But he added: "I have a lot of respect for President Mahmoud Abbas. "He has devoted his life to trying to make peace. President Trump is very fond of him. He likes him very much personally."

