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## Religious slaughter decision due



Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and Shiekh Dr Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa PHOTO: FACEBOOK

BY SIMCHA ABIR

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and Shiekh Dr Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa have called for the European Court of Justice to reconsider banning religious slaughter in the Belgian regions of Flanders and Wallonia.

A 'legality' hearing took place on Wednesday.

For Jewish and Muslim communities, freedom to practise religious slaughter of animals is fundamental to the future of Europe's minority groups.

Both religious leaders view the decision as a landmark judgement.

"Food plays an important role in our religious life and how we prepare food represents a key tenet of our faiths," they noted in a joint statement.

Bans on religious slaughter of animals for food has been used to limit migration from religious groups throughout history. The first ban occurred in Switzerland as a response to Jews fleeing Russian pogroms in the nineteenth century. Similar bans led up to World War Two.

The religious leaders noted that Muslims have increasingly been targets of legislation including by the Far Right in the Netherlands.

Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt and Shiekh Dr Al-Issa added that bans are not justified, whether targeting kosher or halal food.

Both view a ban as a violation of "core principles" that Europe must back.

"They noted, "While freedom of religion is inscribed as a fundamental right throughout the democracies of Europe, it is meaningless without allowing individuals and communities the freedom to practise their religions. We respect Belgian sovereignty and the right of its regions to promote social cohesion, but urge them to rethink these bans.

"Targeting the religious practices of minority groups in this way can only harm relations between communities and undermine social cohesion."

Regarding the hearing, Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt and Shiekh Dr Al-Issa called on judges to account for "historical intentions" and the precedent being set.

"If the Belgian bans are upheld, the message that the Court is sending to minority religious communities in Europe is clear, they are not welcome," they said.

Both fired a stark warning to the judiciary.

"They explained, "We cannot expect religious communities to stay in Europe and thrive as contributing members of their societies if the very act of their food consumption is to be treated as a crime. We urge the Court to take into account the needs of religious communities in its judgement and interests of building a Europe of diversity and inclusion."

