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Professor Dershowitz To Norway's Jews: Take Courage

Cautions Trondheim Students Against Academic Boycott of Israel



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Professor Alan Dershowitz, Rabbi Shaul Wilhelm.

by **Baila Olidort** - Oslo, Norway

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Harvard Professor **Alan Dershowitz** met with leading members of Oslo's Jewish community at the city's Chabad House last week, where he spoke about the extreme anti-Israel, anti-Semitic attitudes he encountered in Norway. He urged them to take lessons in Jewish pride and courage from Chabad.

The world famous civil rights lawyer who is typically invited to meet with heads of state wherever he travels, told the group of about 30—among them a number of professors—that he was turned down for meetings with Norway's leaders. His offers to speak at NTNU-Trondheim and Oslo universities were also declined because of his views on Israel.



"I've spoken at every major university in the world, German, Russian, Chinese universities, and even at Bir Zeit. Only twice in my life have I been turned down. The first time in Apartheid South Africa when I was **Nelson Mandela's** lawyer, and the only other time has been here."

Over an informal breakfast Friday morning hosted by Rabbi **Shaul Wilhelm**, Oslo's Chabad representative, the outspoken activist observed prejudice against Israel so pervasive in Norway's government, academic and media establishments, it is intimidating to Jews and to honest discussion at every level of society.

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Dershowitz came to Norway on the invitation of the ICEJ (International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem) and was invited by NTNU students independently of the university. He read the first line

of a petition prepared by Norwegian professors to boycott Israel, showing the students that it is not occupation, but rather the existence of the State of Israel as a whole that Norwegian academics take issue with: "Since 1948 the State of Israel has occupied Palestinian land..."

As a formal petition it consequently failed to garner the necessary signatures. But it is effectively being practiced against Israel by Norwegian universities, he said, cautioning the students that if they would attempt to pursue it formally, they would be shunned in the academic community, and find themselves the object of a reverse boycott.

As well, he added, "we will put together the greatest legal team assembled and we will sue you in front of the international courts, in front of the courts of Europe and Norway," for practicing racial and religious discrimination against Israel's Jewish professors.

For local Jews who have grown accustomed to keeping a low profile, Dershowitz's fearlessness was a stunning eye-opener. "After so many years of living here and hearing people tell me that day is night and night is day, I've stopped screaming that it's not true," one of the guests at the Chabad House breakfast who preferred to remain anonymous, told Rabbi Wilhelm after the meeting. "Mr. Dershowitz comes along and opens the window and says it's a beautiful day!"

Dershowitz promised the guests—among them academics and Jews in leadership positions—that he will encourage his colleagues and friends to include Oslo on their tours to Europe because this small Jewish community "needs help from the outside." When it comes to its record on Israel and the Jews, Norway is the worst country in the world, he said. It is "on the wrong side of history, morality and democratic values.

"Norway permits the butchering of seals and whales, but does not allow the most humane means of animal slaughter" simply because it is needed by Jews. Norway was the first the country in the western world to prohibit production of kosher meat.

According to Rabbi Wilhelm, less than 1000 people are registered as Jews in Norway. "But in reality there must be more like 2000." Eight hundred live in Oslo, where Chabad has been working hard to inspire a change in Jewish attitudes. It drew a record number of 250 at its Purim bash last week—a hopeful sign that despite the hostile climate, Jewish identity is gaining confidence here.

Dershowitz was emphatic about Chabad's gift to Jewish life everywhere--at Harvard, where he enjoys a close friendship with Rabbi **Hirschy** and **Elkie Zarchi**, and especially in a place like Norway, where it takes courage to be Jewish. "We have to continue to fight this fight, we can't give up. That's Chabad's motto. Chabad never gives up. I never give up. That's why I love Chabad," he said, describing Chabad as a movement "born in courage." Dershowitz recalled his meetings with the **Lubavitcher Rebbe**.

"They say prophecy ended with destruction of temple. But the Rebbe saw the future, he understood condition of American Judaism, world Judaism, The Rebbe was as close to being a prophet as any human being individual I've ever encountered."

Rabbi Wilhelm, who arranged the meeting with Mr. Dershowitz on short notice, told lubavitch.com that he cannot overstate the enormous impact that the American lawyer had on the individuals who met with him.

"I received calls and texts from people who finally realized that it's time to speak up. One woman called me and said 'we finally have to be vocal about who we are.' Another said she took the courage to make a statement on Facebook and wrote 'I am a Jew and I am sticking up for Israel.'"

Mark Kriger, a Professor of Strategic Management at the Norwegian School of Management told lubavitch.com: "I will remember the breakfast meeting with Prof. Dershowitz probably for the rest of my life. I felt highly energized by the time spent with a scholar and agent for social change - in the best sense of those words."

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