

Shas MK, police: Do not rush to judgement

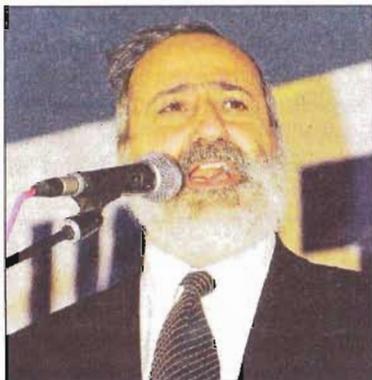
MATTHEW WAGNER

TEL AVIV – Following the attack on a Tel Aviv gay community centre, Nissim Ze'ev, a member of Knesset for the Sephardic Charedi Shas Party, told Ynet it was important to avoid rushing to judgement over who was responsible and said the attack may have been perpetrated by terrorists or a member of the gay community itself.

“It’s possible that the shooter was a terrorist who came to murder Jews. So why are people saying that it was against the community. As long as things are not clear and the police have yet to catch the murderer, I think people should be careful with their responses.”

Ze'ev added: “It’s not even certain that it happened because of this population’s affiliation. It’s possible the person who fired the shots belongs to the same population.”

But members of the gay community said Shas should take some responsibility for making statements over the years that had created an atmosphere where anti-gay violence could occur.



Shas MK Nissim Ze'ev Photo: Isranet

“A murder was waiting to happen,” Danny Zak, a gay activist and journalist, told *The Jerusalem Post* on Saturday night.

“The Shas Party has the blood of two innocent kids on their hands,” Zak said.

Police Commissioner Inspector General David Cohen on Monday cautioned against “tainting sectors and populations with suspicions”.

Ze'ev objected to any suggestion his party shouldered any responsibility for instigating the shooting.

“This is a blood libel. They are taking advantage of the blood in order to

murder a human being’s character,” he said.

On Sunday, Shas issued a statement condemning the attack. “The attacker must be located quickly and judged severely. Murder, understandably, is against the Torah way. Any attack is against the religion of Israel.”

Zak said Shas had a history of making derogatory remarks about the gay community.

“Shas has blamed gays for earthquakes. This is incitement, but no one is put on trial for it,” he said.

Last year, Shas MK Shlomo Benizri blamed gays for a spate of regional earthquakes and invoked passages from the Talmud and the Gemarrah to support his claims.

“Why do earthquakes happen?” he said. “One of the reasons is the things to which the Knesset gives legitimacy, to sodomy.”

Shas legislators have also made controversial statements about homosexuality in recent years. In February 2006, Shas Chairman Eli Yishai called it a disease.

“I did not determine this, medical science did. It’s a disease. The Torah

talks about its severity, and I wish [homosexuals] a speedy recovery.”

In January 2008, Ze'ev said gays should be put into rehabilitation centres together with drug addicts and alcoholics. He said it was a “plague that may destroy Jewish Israel,” adding that it should be dealt with “just as the Health Ministry is dealing with bird flu”.

On Sunday, Israel’s Chief Rabbinate released a statement calling the shooting “an unthinkable, vile crime”, adding “when Moses saw a Jew beating another Jew he called him evil. This is all the more true when a Jew murders a Jew.”

The Hod organisation for Orthodox gay men also condemned “the horrible massacre committed against the gay and lesbian community.”

Ron Yosef, a gay rabbi who runs the group, said he had received death threats recently.

The Havruta group for religious gays in Israel has opened a 24-hour hotline for religious gays and their families.