



Clashes continue between Arab-Jewish residents of Acre

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Jpost.com staff and Yaakov Lappin , THE JERUSALEM POST

In the third consecutive evening of clashes between Jewish and Arab residents of Acre, police were yet again forced to respond to riots taking place in the northern city's eastern neighborhood early Friday night. At least four Jewish residents were arrested while police subdued the crowds.

Police closed off the eastern entrance and special forces and Border Police forces armed with crowd control gear were preparing to enter the area if called.

On Friday afternoon, the clashes which ensued over Yom Kippur were renewed after dozens of Jewish residents hurled rocks at Arabs living in the northern city's eastern neighborhood. Police forces arriving at the scene managed to disperse the crowds and several arrests were made.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister and Kadima leader Tzipi Livni said that Israel would not allow citizens to take the law into their own hands.

"It doesn't matter how angry they were, every citizen must respect Yom Kippur, the holy day, outside of the home," she said on a visit to the city.

The new Kadima chairman added that the incident was a watershed line which would determine "if we remain with yesterday's anger, or whether we can move on from this and improve Jewish-Arab relations."

Livni met with Acre Mayor Shimon Lancry to discuss Wednesday night and Thursday's riots.

Earlier Friday, Public Security Minister Avi Dichter vowed to put the "perpetrators and inciters" of the Acre violence "behind lock and key."

Following a meeting with Lancry, Dichter said police had no prior intelligence of the violence and that the riots did not appear to have been planned.

He stressed that restoring calm to the city was not only the job of police, but also of community leaders.

"We are planning ahead for the scenario of, God forbid, violence spreading to other places. I call on leaders, both in the Jewish community and Arab community, to act sensibly," he said.

Prior to the meeting, Dichter was greeted with shouts of "No one is protecting us," from an angry crowd.

Meanwhile, some 700 police officers were deployed in Acre Friday morning to help restore calm to the city following the clashes.

Israel Police Commissioner Ch.-Insp. Dudi Cohen held a special situation assessment with other senior

police officials and it was decided that police reinforcements would remain in the city until full calm was restored.

Nevertheless, Dichter ordered police to refrain from using live ammunition and stun grenades should clashes resume.

In addition, the local municipality provided Acre's schools with increased security.

Police were also on high alert in other cities with mixed Jewish and Arab populations including Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa, Ramle and Lod, as well as the Wadi Ara region.

Jerusalem Police chief Cmdr. Aharon Franco decided to increase police presence in the Old City and east Jerusalem.

During the violence, which broke out on Wednesday night, hundreds of the city's Arab residents vandalized Jewish-owned shops and vehicles and clashed with police.

On Thursday evening, tensions boiled over again during a demonstration held by Jews against the previous evening's occurrences. Both Jews and Arabs clashed with police in various parts of the racially divided city, leading to 10 arrests. In total, at least eight people were lightly wounded in the successive nights of violence.

For part of Thursday evening, the city was in lockdown, its entrances temporarily closed off, as hundreds of riot and border police armed with water cannons and tear gas worked to restore calm to Acre's streets.

At the end of a meeting Thursday night with senior representatives from both sides, Cohen called on Jews and Arabs to ensure that tensions subside and to prevent the violence from spreading to other nearby neighborhoods.

"What happened on Yom Kippur was very severe, and both the city's Jewish and Arab leaders, as well as the police, will learn lessons from it," he said, stressing, "This was a local incident only."

"I call on both sides, Jews and Arabs, to continue coexisting as they have done for years and to respect one another," added Cohen, calling on public figures and local leaders not to fan the flames of violence.

Lancry told Army Radio that only in two or three days time would it be possible to determine whether tensions had subsided. Lancry blamed Acre's Arab residents for the outbreak of violence.

"The incidents over Yom Kippur were very severe, all red lines were crossed," he added. "The Israel Police must use the investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice."

MK Uri Ariel (NU-NRP) accused MK Abbas Zakour (United Arab List) of inciting the Arab rioters during the clashes.

Ariel claimed that the Arab-Israeli MK didn't turn to police, but "conducted events" from a nearby house.

Meanwhile, Zakour urged Public Security Minister Avi Dichter to prevent Ariel and Yisrael Beiteinu chairman Avigdor Lieberman from touring Acre's Old City, saying such a visit would hinder efforts to restore calm, Army Radio reported.

Speaking to Israel Radio, Lieberman termed the incidents a pogrom carried out by Arabs and compared it to Kristallnacht.

MK Arie Elad (NRP-NU) also called the Acre riots a pogrom and said police "shouldn't be surprised when Jews take up arms to protect themselves."

AP contributed to this report

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