

Breaking: Activists Cheer Arrest of Monrowitz in Israel

By Adam Dickter
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The fugitive chasidic man accused of abusing four boys whose parents brought them to him for psychotherapy was arrested in Israel today and now awaits extradition to the U.S., a step his accusers have been seeking for more than 20 years, Haaretz reported.

Rabbi Avrohom Mondrowitz, who worked in Borough Park, is a member of the Gur sect who fled to Israel in 1985 after being indicted on eight counts of child abuse and four counts of sodomy. The alleged victims ranged in age from 9 to 15.

One of the accusers claims he came to Mondrowitz to be treated after being abused by a teacher, only to then be abused again by Mondrowitz, whose credentials as both a rabbi and psychologist have been disputed by critics who have delved into his background.

The case has been a political thorn in the side of Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes for years as sex-abuse watchdogs accused him of reluctance to apprehend and prosecute Mondrowitz for fear of offending Orthodox voters. The case has also been notorious because of allegations that teachers and rabbis in Mondrowitz's community looked the other way when confronted with accusations against him.

Hynes has said, through a spokesman, that until recent changes in extradition law between the U.S. were made, Mondrowitz was beyond his reach.

Earlier this week Israeli authorities nabbed another man accused of molesting Orthodox boys, Stefan Colmer, whose extradition was also sought by Hynes.

Mondrowitz lived in Tel Aviv and moved to Chicago in the 1950s, attending the Telshe yeshiva in Wickliffe, Ohio, according to Haaretz. He became a respected commentator and lecturer and opened a psychotherapy practice.

Rabbi Mark Dratch, founder of Jsafe, an organization supporting victims of sexual abuse in the Jewish community, said he has spoken with two of Mondrowitz's accusers, and believes there may be "hundreds" more.

"This is a tremendous step toward justice," said the rabbi of the pending extradition. "It gives hope to his victims and victims of other perpetrators may now be encouraged to step forward."

He said the Mondrowitz case was particularly notorious because of the large number of victims and because of the pressure on victims in the community not to come forward."

In the years since, says Rabbi Dratch, "across the spectrum of the community there is a lot more awareness and programs and safeguards in place, but we still have a long way to go. There are still issues to be addressed, such as fear of reporting to legal authorities."

Amy Neustein, an activist who is writing a book about rabbinic abuse, called the arrest of Mondrowitz "a ray of sunshine for the victims because of the pain they have carried around for almost 25 years."