

Israeli police probing sexual assault complaint against ultra-conservative rabbi

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Zvi Tau, a high-ranking ultra-conservative Israeli rabbi

Tel Aviv, November 13 (RHC)-- The Israeli police have opened an investigation into a sexual assault complaint filed by a woman against a high-ranking ultra-conservative rabbi in the southern occupied West Bank city of al-Khalil.

The probe was launched after Nehama Te'ena, an Israeli settler in al-Khalil, came forward to publicly accuse Rabbi Zvi Tau, a prominent ultra-conservative, of sexually abusing her since she was 10 years old

as he was frequently around her family.

Te'ena said in an interview with Israel's Channel 12 that it was important for her to speak openly about what she went through with the 85-year-old rabbi, who heads an influential Jewish educational institution in the occupied al-Quds and is the spiritual leader of the far-right Noam political faction in Israel. "He dragged me to a place and hurt me several times, also when I was a girl and even after I was married and a mother — he kept doing it," Te'ena said.

"I tried to ask for help in different ways but I did not know how to express myself at the time," she said, adding that one time as a 10-year-old she tried to call the police to inform them of the abuse.

Te'ena underlined that she faced enormous pressure from those around her to keep her allegations quiet, with many dismissing her claims because Tau was a well-known powerful rabbi. "He used his power and image to carry out the abuse," Te'ena said.

Reports by Channel 12 and other Israeli news outlets said police had opened a probe and were looking for other potential victims. Te'ena first came forward publicly with allegations against Tau in August, when she wrote a Facebook post saying Tau committed "ongoing" sexual assaults against her 30 years earlier.

At the time, the Israeli woman said she had gone to the police and the media but the rabbi's associates had succeeded in hushing up the story. In recent weeks, she has staged protests outside the Knesset, accusing Tau of raping her and others and demanding to know why the Israel police have refused to investigate.

Tau has repeatedly defended prominent Israeli political and religious figures accused and even convicted of sexual assault and rape.

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