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Russia's Chief Rabbi Condemns 'Propaganda of Hate' After Anti-Israeli Riots

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Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar of Russia. **Sergei Guneev, RIA Novosti / kremlin.ru**

The leader of Russia's Jewish communities has condemned what he called the "propaganda of hate" after anti-Israeli riots rocked the country's North Caucasus republic of Dagestan.

Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar linked Sunday's violence at Makhachkala International Airport to previous anti-Semitic attacks in Russia's Muslim-majority regions that took place in the weeks since Israel launched a war against Hamas militants in Palestinian Gaza.

"It's necessary to try to do everything to make sure that the propaganda of hatred has no place in our country," Lazar said in a statement shared with the RBC news website Thursday.

"It's not about Israel or the Middle East, they have their own problems. Our problem seems to be education. Something has really changed in the North Caucasus, and not for the better," Lazar said, adding that he is expecting answers from the authorities.

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Dagestan's Governor Sergei Melikov meanwhile said that not all rioters would be punished for the violence after several high-profile public figures urged him to spare the demonstrators.

“Those who broke the gates, robbed shop windows, toppled police cars — they’ll answer before the law,” Melikov told reporters late Wednesday. “Those who stood by and watched or simply waved the Palestinian flag will not.”

The Kremlin, which blamed the violence squarely on foreign interference via social media, said it supported Melikov’s efforts to restore order in Dagestan.

At least 15 of the 83 detained anti-Israeli protesters were sentenced to 3-8 days in jail on misdemeanor charges ranging from petty hooliganism to participating in an unauthorized rally.

An estimated 1,200 residents were estimated to have converged on Makhachkala airport following calls on social media to protest the arrival of Israeli citizens from Tel Aviv.

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