

# Israel Stops Hundreds of Jews from Moving to Iran as Asylum Seekers

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*Israeli authorities have stopped dozens of Jewish families of the Lev Tahor ultra-Orthodox sect from fleeing to Iran where they had applied for asylum.*

“Israel and the US are working to prevent members of an extremist ultra-Orthodox sect from moving to Iran, amid fears they could be used as a bargaining chip by Tehran,” the Times of Israel newspaper reported, noting that the group; which is anti-Zionist, applied for political asylum in 2018.

The paper said documents presented at a US federal court in 2019 showed that leaders of the Hasidic community requested asylum in Iran and swore allegiance to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

According to the *Ynet News* site, concerns were building that hundreds of members of the group, mainly based in Guatemala, could be trying to move to Iran after dozens of families were spotted at the airport in Guatemala, apparently on their way to the Kurdistan-Iran border.

The report said their relatives contacted the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Justice Department and asked them to urgently contact their Guatemalan counterparts to prevent the families from leaving.

According to reports, the Guatemalan authorities detained a number of the group’s members who hold American citizenship.

“The Shalit deal will look like child’s play next to this,” the relatives said, referring to the 2011 prisoner deal with Hamas in which Israel released 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for soldier Gilad Shalit.

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*Featured image: Israeli police officers clash with Ultra Orthodox Jewish men during a protest against the enforcement of coronavirus emergency regulations, in the Ultra Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, October 4, 2020 (photo credit: NATI SHOHAT/FLASH90)*

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