



## **High Court: Bar Ilan Street to Remain Open on Sabbath**

August 16, 1996

JERUSALEM

In a decision likely to evoke protests from the city's fervently Orthodox community, Israel's High Court of Justice has ruled that a main thoroughfare in Jerusalem remain open to traffic on the Sabbath.

Soon after the court's 6-1 decision Thursday barring the closure of Bar Ilan to Sabbath traffic, posters appeared in fervently Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem calling on residents to demonstrate this weekend in support of closing the street.

The presence of Sabbath traffic on Bar Ilan has led to a series of often violent demonstrations in recent weeks.

It has become a hot-button issue on both sides of the religious divide, with fervently Orthodox Jews seeking laws that will respect the Sabbath and religious holidays. Secular Jews view such laws as an infringement on their freedom.

For much of Thursday, a tense atmosphere prevailed at the court, where activists from both sides awaited the ruling.

Their conflicts became evident outside the courtroom, where the two sides became embroiled in shouting matches.

The judges, who called for the formation of a committee to examine the matter of Sabbath traffic on streets throughout Jerusalem, ruled that an injunction against closing Bar Ilan would remain in place until the committee issued its recommendations in two months.

"The purpose of such a committee will be to find a way to nurture coexistence between all segments of Israel's population," the justices wrote in the majority opinion led by court President Aharon Barak. Only Justice Zvi Tal dissented.

Thursday's ruling came after the expanded panel heard petitions from religious and secular groups regarding the thoroughfare, which cuts through religious neighborhoods in the Holy City.

"What is at stake here is not just one street, but the entire future of how Israel will look in the 21st century. Will it be a democratic state, for all its citizens?" said Lior Horev, who submitted one of three petitions to keep the street open.

The battle over Bar Ilan heightened this year, after the victories of religious political parties in the May 29 national elections.



The dispute was further fueled with the decision in July by Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy, a member of the National Religious Party, to close Bar Ilan to traffic during Sabbath and holiday prayer times for a four-month experimental period.

The High Court suspended Levy's order pending its own ruling. Both sides of the dispute gave limited acceptance to the court's proposal to form a committee to study the issue.

"Of course we welcome it, as long as the interests of all parties are represented on the committee," said Knesset member Yossi Sarid of the secularist Meretz Party, who also submitted a petition against closing the road.

"Form a committee, please. But Bar Ilan must be closed. Every time a car goes by on the Sabbath, residents of the area are hurt," said Meir Shechter, a lawyer for the religious petitioners. Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert said he would honor the ruling, but added that a proposal he made recently to build a tunnel underneath the road would be the optimal solution.