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# THE Australian Jewish News

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EXTRADITED FROM ISRAEL TO FACE CHARGES

## AUSTRALIA DAY FOR LEIFER

REBECCA DAVIS

MALKA Leifer was expected to arrive in Australia last night (Wednesday) after being extradited from Israel.

In the culmination of 74 court hearings and an arduous seven-year legal battle, the former principal of the Adass Israel School was due to return to Melbourne to answer 74 charges of sexual abuse, 13 years after she fled.

Transferred to Ben Gurion airport from New Tirza women's prison, Leifer's early Monday morning (Israel time) departure occurred just hours before the airport shut down for one week in an effort to protect Israel against coronavirus mutations. Escorted by members of Victoria Police, Leifer then flew to Frankfurt, Germany, before continuing on to Australia.

With uncertainty and speculation swirling as to exactly when Leifer would touch down, some media attended Tullamarine Airport on Tuesday evening but were left disappointed. At the time of press, *The AJN* understands that she was due to arrive last night (Wednesday).

It is expected Leifer will then spend at least two weeks in quarantine within a Victorian corrections facility.

Caulfield MP David Southwick sought assurance on this point on Wednesday in a letter to Victorian Police Minister Lisa Neville, fearing Leifer may be alternatively held in hotel quarantine.

Leifer could appear before the Melbourne Magistrates Court via video link for the initial administrative hearing before the end of



Malka Leifer being led into court in Jerusalem in 2018.

Photo AP Photo/Mahmoud Illean

this week. She would then have the opportunity to apply for bail.

When approached by *The AJN*, Leifer's alleged victims, sisters Dasi Erlich, Nicole Meyer and Ely Sapper declined to comment for legal reasons.

The trio have worked tirelessly over the years, campaigning to have Leifer returned to Australia in order to face justice – and in the process garnering widespread support with the #BringLeiferBack movement.

Paying tribute to the sisters' perseverance and strength, Federal Member for Macnamara Josh Burns said, "Justice isn't always easy, but it is always worth fighting for. And that's exactly what Dasi, Nicole and Ely did. They are truly remarkable Australians."

Echoing Burns' sentiments,

Southwick concurred, "The return of Malka Leifer to Victoria is a significant and long overdue step towards justice and credit to Dasi, Nicole, Ely and others who have fought so hard to make this day a reality."

Federal Member for Wentworth, and former Australian ambassador to Israel Dave Sharma told *The AJN*, "A day that many feared would never come is here, and for that the [alleged] victims and advocates in this case deserve our deepest gratitude and respect."

He continued, "As the ambassador at the time who handed over the extradition request in 2014, for me personally this is the conclusion of unfinished business from my time in Israel, and deeply satisfying as a result."

Indeed, former Israeli ambus-

sador to Australia Mark Sofer tweeted that while in his official role, he had been "sceptical" that Leifer would be extradited.

"But I was then unaware of the heroism and tenacity of Dasi, Ely and Nicole. I've never been happier to be so wrong," he wrote.

Also taking to Twitter, Israel's former minister of Justice Avi Nissenkorn – who signed off on the extradition order – wrote, "The legal process was long and there were those who tried to pollute it. As Minister of Justice, I promised not to delay the extradition order, and I acted as such. Malka Leifer's [alleged] victims will finally get justice done."

A little closer to home, Jewish communal leaders have rejoiced in the news of Leifer's return.

Welcoming the footage of Leifer

boarding the plane from Israel after "this protracted saga", Zionist Federation of Australia president Jeremy Leibler charged, "That Leifer was allowed to escape justice for so long was a travesty.

"While it's a relief that Israel's justice system has finally prevailed, the time and process that resulted in these delays are completely unacceptable.

"That she [Leifer] is coming is largely due to the tireless efforts of Dasi Erlich and her sisters, as well as their support network. It is they who kept up the pressure and who never gave up."

Further, co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry Alex Rychkin said, "We welcome the news from Israel that Malka Leifer is now en route to Australia following the completion of her extradition process after many years of delay and deception by Leifer that caused tremendous suffering to her alleged victims.

"We hope that this dark chapter will soon come to a close."

AIJAC national chairman, Mark Leibler said, "We hope the images of Malka Leifer being escorted onto a plane to Australia will bring some satisfaction to her many alleged victims.

"Her alleged victims have endured so much for so long and we hope this news has brought them a renewed sense of relief and strength as their pursuit of justice continues."

Meanwhile president of Adass Israel Benjamin Koppel said, "Adass Israel fully supports the legal process in place and will do all that is requested by the authorities to assist in the processing of this case."

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