

# Pope adds to the pressure on Poland to reverse its ban on ritual slaughter

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The Pope has promised Jewish and Muslim leaders in Poland that he will do his best to overturn the ban on religious slaughter that was agreed by the Polish Constitutional Court in January. The Court ruled that ritual slaughter is incompatible with animal welfare regulations.

The Pope has assigned a senior church official to "investigate" the ban, which he said was against the "religious freedom of Polish Jewry".

Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich expressed gratitude for the pope's decision to get involved in the debate over Kosher slaughter, telling The Jerusalem Post that "anyone who supports shechita anywhere in the world is something that is very welcome and encouraging and especially coming from the pope, it really gives us encouragement that together with the Polish government we will find a wise and quick solution."

The Pope met Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) — which represents Jewish communities outside Israel — on Monday to discuss the ban, among other issues.

"The Pope specifically expressed concern about the bans on kosher slaughter in Poland and directed Cardinal Kurt Koch, the president of the Vatican's Commission for Relations with the Jews, to investigate and host a follow-up meeting as early as next week," the WJC said in a statement after their talks.

The Jewish and Muslim communities each number around 20,000 to 30,000 people in Poland, a country of some 38 million people.

European Union rules on the slaughter of livestock are designed to minimise suffering for animals when they are killed, but religious groups are exempted from a requirement that animals be stunned before death.

Kosher and halal slaughter require an animal be killed by slitting its throat and permitting it to bleed to death while conscious.

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said: "It is not the Pope's business to try to interfere with the democratic processes of an independent nation like Poland. We know that the Catholic Church wields inordinate power in Poland, but this should not be used to try and overturn parliamentary or judicial decisions.

"If this ban is revoked after the Vatican intervenes it will be a blow to democracy in Poland. It also poses a potential threat to the independence of every other country that has a large Catholic population and whose government happens to make a decision the pope doesn't like."

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