

**SHRINE FIRE**

(Continued from Page 1)

will be held in one of the largest halls available in order to admit as many members of the public as possible, it was learned today. Israeli police said Friday that they had enough evidence against the suspect to assure a conviction. One report said today that Rohen had confessed though his motives remain unknown.

Meanwhile, an investigation committee headed by Judge Abraham Granott, president of Israel's Supreme Court and including two Arab judges, began open hearings in Jerusalem. Israel has also invited experts and engineers from any country who could expedite repairs to the Moslem shrine to come to Jerusalem to help. Experts from Arab countries would be admitted if the Moslem Religious Council requested it, Government spokesmen said.

The fire was reported at 7:20 a.m. local time Thurs-

day and damaged the south wing of the mosque. The roof over the wing collapsed leaving only charred walls. The El Aksa mosque sits atop the Western (Wailing) Wall on what is known as the Temple Mount. It stands about 100 yards from the Dome of the Rock (Mosque of Omar) where, according to Moslem tradition, the Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven. It was on that site that King Abdullah, of Jordan, grandfather of King Hussein, was assassinated by Arab terrorists in 1951. After the twin shrines of Mecca and Medina, the El Aksa mosque is the holiest spot to devout Moslems.

Israeli firemen, who fought the blaze for three-and-a-half hours, arrived on the scene eight minutes after the alarm was sounded. But they were hampered by furious Arab mobs who pelted them with rocks and sticks and damaged a fire hydrant so that water had to be brought by tank trucks.

Premier Golda Meir ex-

**AJC: "HEARTFELT COMPASSION"**

Regret and "heartfelt compassion" for the peoples of Islam were expressed by the American Jewish Congress over the fire which damaged the major religious shrine, El-Aksa, in Jerusalem.

A statement by Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld of Cleveland, president of the American Jewish Congress, said:

"We are deeply saddened by the news of the fire at the El-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem this morning. The damage to one of the great holy places in Islam is a

blow not only to those of that faith but to everyone who respects and esteems the religious beliefs of his neighbors.

"We are confident that the people in the government of Israel will leave nothing undone in an effort to fix responsibility for this unfortunate event. No matter what ultimately may be found to be the cause, we extend to the peoples of Islam our heartfelt compassion over the damage done to a place they revere and hold sacred."

pressed deep regret over the fire and said that a special investigating committee would look into its causes immediately. Some Arab agitators said it was set by Israelis and some Israeli sources claimed that Arab terrorists were responsible and were trying to cause unrest in the city.

Mayor Teddy Kollek of

were rescued by Arabs who entered the blazing shrine.

Arab women and children of the neighborhood brought buckets of water. But Jerusalem fire chief J. Lieberman said that gangs of incited Arab youths prevented his fire-fighters from extinguishing the blaze much sooner. He said his men not only were stoned but some were attacked bodily. Israeli police and troops were called in and shots were fired in the air to disperse the mobs.

Sheikh Hilmi Moustahib, the Cadi, or chief Moslem religious authority in Jerusalem, told a press conference that a committee of experts established by the local Moslem leadership has already determined that the fire, which all but destroyed the south wing of the Mosque, was "maliciously set" by one or more persons. He said the leadership would refuse to recognize the findings of the Israeli inquiry committee but would agree to an international board of inquiry to include representatives of the Arab states. He demand-

ed that they keys to the Temple Mount area on which are located the El Eksa mosque, the Dome of the Rock (Mosque of Omar) and the Western Wall, be turned over to the Waqf and that all archaeological excavations in the area be terminated.

The Arab world reacted with frenzy to the fire. Radio broadcasts in most Arab capitals blamed Israeli authorities for the mysterious blaze and called on 500 million Moslems all over the world to rise in a "jihad" - holy war - against Israel. But the radio exhortations coming, some said, only minutes after the fire was announced, led some sources to believe that it was set by Arab arsonists in order to arouse religious fury against Israel.

A call for a holy war was broadcast on Cairo radio by the Palestine Liberation Organization which accused Israel of deliberately burning the mosque. All Arab news broadcasts led off with the headline, "Israel burned the El Aksa mosque."

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