

Hong Kong Synagogue Rerieved

HONG KONG (JTA) — Trustees of Ohel Leah synagogue here have agreed to delay demolition of their 85-year-old building in compliance with a ruling by Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, chief rabbi of the United Kingdom and colonies.

However, The Australian Jewish Times, reports, the rabbinic order is not legally binding and only requests a suspension of the demolition plans until Jakobovits assesses the situation, according to Gus Chui, secretary of the Municipal Services Branch here.

The Jewish community has rejected religious rulings against the demolition from the two chief rabbis of Israel arguing that they did not have jurisdiction over Hong Kong.

Synagogue trustees

want to redevelop the site of the Sephardic-style synagogue — one of the last in Asia — beginning no earlier than late spring and early summer.

Last December, Chui overruled the municipal Antiquities Advisory Board and lifted the proposed monument status on the synagogue, thus removing any legal prohibition against demolition. He said he would reconsider reimposing the ban if the Jewish community wished.

Apparently many members of the Jewish community have argued to preserve the synagogue for historical and architectural reasons.

In his letter, Jakobovits recognized a rift in the Jewish community: "Steps toward demolition will be suspended until I have had an opportunity to clarify the argument for and against the proposed action with the community . . . with a view enabling me to issue a formal religious verdict," he wrote.

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