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Orthodox Church to challenge sale of its property to Israel settlers



The Greek Orthodox Church will next week petition against a final ruling of Israel's Supreme Court which approved the sale of church property in East Jerusalem's Old City to pro-settlement group Ateret Cohanim.

Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth reported that the petition will argue that the sale of the property was based on bribery and the church figures who signed the deal were corrupt, immediately fleeing the country after signing the deal.

Last month the Supreme Court ruled that the church had failed to provide sufficient evidence that the deal was made fraudulently.

Commenting on the sale of the property, spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Church, Issa Musleh, told AFP that the sale was only made possible by forged documents.

The sale, which took place in 2004, triggered widespread Palestinian anger and led to the 2005 dismissal of Patriarch Irineos I.

"The settlers want to take over our heritage," Musleh stressed.

According to Yedioth Ahronoth, the petition will be based on the accounts of Ted Bloomfield, director of the Petra Hotel, one of the sold properties. He said that Ateret Cohanim had paid him money for years in order to push forward the selling of the hotel.

He also said that the director of Ateret Cohanim, Matti Dan, had bribed the deputy of Patriarch Irineos I and the accountant of the church for years in order to facilitate the deal.

- Source: middleeastmonitor.com