

Israel Rejects Bid to Bar Images of People from Jerusalem Bus Ads

Deal was aimed at thwarting a planned campaign against exclusion of woman that would feature pictures of women under the slogan 'Women of Jerusalem, nice to meet you.'

By Nir Hasson | Nov.21, 2012 | 8:14 AM | ■ 2

The state does not accept the Egged bus cooperative's decision to bar all advertisements with pictures of people from its buses in Jerusalem, the government told the High Court of Justice last week.

Three months ago, Egged reached an agreement with Canaan, the company that handles advertising on buses, under which future ad campaigns in Jerusalem would feature no pictures of people - men, women or children.

The deal was aimed at thwarting a planned campaign by the Yerushalmim movement featuring pictures of women under the slogan "Women of Jerusalem, nice to meet you." The campaign, which included no provocative pictures, was meant to protest what Yerushalmim termed the exclusion of women from Jerusalem's public square.

Egged and Canaan said they feared ultra-Orthodox extremists would vandalize buses bearing ads with pictures of women, or even stone them, endangering the passengers - things that had happened in the past. But since banning pictures of women only would be discriminatory, they decided to ban pictures of everyone.

Yerushalmim petitioned the court against this decision, and last week the state submitted its response. The brief said the government not only disagreed with the state-subsidized bus cooperative's decision, but considered it a violation of the terms of Egged's business license.

"Our position is that the agreement appears to constitute a violation of the terms of [Egged's] license," it said. "Our impression is that the agreement's goal is to prevent advertisements featuring women. The agreement was borne of the demand to give equality to ads featuring women, as per the terms of its license, and its goal seems to be to circumvent this demand by evasion, which should not be accepted."

On Tuesday, Justice Miriam Naor gave Yerushalmim a week to decide whether it is satisfied by the state's response, in which case it should withdraw the petition, or whether it wants to proceed

with the case. But the group's lawyer, Aviad Hacoheh, has already concluded that it isn't satisfactory, and said he doesn't intend to withdraw the petition.

"The companies thought that by not publishing ads with men, either, they solved the problem," he said. "The state is telling them they haven't solved the problem. But now I want to understand what the state is doing about it. Does it intend to revoke the license, or impose sanctions to enforce its decision?"

Yerushalmim director Uri Ayalon agreed. "We'll continue to fight until it's possible to publish ads with women," he said.

Eged spokesman Ran Ratner commented, "At a time when Israel is mired in war and hundreds of Eged drivers have received emergency call-up orders, I'm not dealing with everyday issues. So I'll leave the response to our legal advisers in court."