

INTERNATIONAL

Canadian woman says she can't leave Israel

Parents given temporary custody of her two sons after obtaining a 'no exit' order against her

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SPECIAL TO THE CJN, JERUSALEM

Pregnant single mom Hana Gan is trying to get her kids back and return to Canada after being barred from leaving Israel last month and seeing authorities give temporary custody of her two sons to her parents.

According to her supporters, she sought to leave because her parents wanted her to be more religiously observant, while her parents contend she can't care for her kids because she isn't responsible with money.

Gan, who has been advised by her supporters not to speak with the media, moved to Israel last December seeking a better life for her children, but almost immediately realized it was a mistake. Living with her parents at the time, she decided to return to Canada.

Earlier in February, according to spokesperson Moti Leybel of the Israeli organization Bereaved Parents with Living Children, Gan filed complaints with Israeli police alleging that her father was beating her. Then, saying her father had destroyed the children's Canadian passports, she reached out for help to Leybel's organization.

Leybel said situations such as Gan's are common in Israel and that his organization represents "hundreds and hundreds of parents" whose children have been removed without cause by social services.

Leybel took Gan to the airport on Feb. 19, after she had obtained emergency passports for her children. He waited outside in case there was trouble. "I got this phone call, and she was crying, screaming and shouting. They tried to get her kids away. She told me, 'I'm holding them tight, I don't want them to take them.'"

She wasn't allowed to leave Israel because her parents had obtained a "no exit" order against her. She managed to leave the airport, and Leybel took her and her sons, ages 5 and 6-1/2, to a friend's apartment. However, on Feb. 22, police tracked them down.

Leybel said the police reaction was disproportionate. "They acted like she was a serial killer. At one point, there were 15

cops in the apartment, in the stairway."

When police took Gan in for questioning, social workers handed her children over to her parents, Eli and Drora Gan, with whom they were to remain while awaiting a March 3 custody hearing.

Leybel said that with an emergency warrant, children can be removed from their parents' home for up to seven days without a judge's signature.

The social services department of the Mateh Yehudah Regional Council in Gan's parents' city of Beit Shemesh released a short statement reading, in part: "This is a complex matter which is now being held behind closed doors in court... we hope, of course, for a speedy resolution for the benefit of all those involved."

According to her lawyer, Benny Dekel, Gan decided to leave Israel when her parents demanded "that she lead a life the way they see it, as frum Jews... She felt a little bit stressed and uncomfortable, so she decided to leave."

Dekel said the parents obtained a "no exit" order with almost no documentation. "Whenever there's even a small, minimal risk to kids, the courts give this order right away." He said he's working on cancelling the no exit order as well as restoring her guardianship of the children.

Gan's mother, Drora, told *The CJN* the children would be in danger if they left Israel.

She said she and her husband have tried for years to help Gan live independently with her children and only stepped in now because they saw no choice. "She has gambling and money problems. She used to spend all the rent money. There were always problems."

Gan lived with them for four years in Canada, where they had returned for business reasons just after Gan's divorce, Drora said, and she depended on them financially, despite receiving social assistance.

In a blog post from 2013, Gan admitted, "I don't know if I'm ready to quit the gamble [sic], or stop shopping." In that post, she called the timing of her parents' return to Toronto just after her divorce "miraculous."

Although Gan was born in Israel, she



Hana Gan FACEBOOK PHOTO

qualified as a new immigrant and received financial aid on arrival. Drora said Gan spent the money shopping, leaving her penniless again.

"As soon as she arrives in Canada, the children would be on the street. She has no house, no driving license. She lost it when she didn't pay her parking tickets. She doesn't have any credit cards because of all her credit problems. She couldn't rent a place because nobody would rent to her."

Gan's supporters sent *The CJN* letters from three Toronto families offering her a home. One, Rebecca Sorokin, met Gan and her children in 2014. She said she's disgusted with any system that separates mothers from children without due process. "I am half-Israeli, but I'm... [also] a social worker, and I'm a mom. We shouldn't support [Israel] no matter what, if there's flaws in the system."

"This is just a loving mom, trying to cope and take care of her kids. She just wants to

get back home where she felt safe."

Drora rejected allegations that Gan isn't safe in Israel or that her father, Eli, abused Gan during her current pregnancy.

"People think my husband beat her in the tummy, put her on the floor. What is he, an SS man? She can make up stories," Drora said. "You should see how her children love my husband, their grandfather. They tell him, 'Saba, you are the best in the world.'"

She also says Gan's non-Jewish ex-husband in Canada has sent a letter supporting their custody claim, saying he wants his children raised as Jews.

Though she and her husband Eli are religious, Drora insisted, "We never fought over religion... We never fought with her to come here [to Israel]. She wanted to come, she said, 'My children will have a better life.'"

Attempts to reach the Canadian Embassy for comment on the case were unsuccessful. ■