

Israeli hotels no longer banned from mounting Christmas trees

by [Michele Chabin](#)

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JERUSALEM (RNS) Israel's Chief Rabbinate has backed down on its long-standing prohibition against placing Christmas trees in the country's hotels, as well as other rules related to the Jewish Sabbath and holidays.

The Chief Rabbinate's new regulations, announced on Thursday (March 5), came in response to a petition from Hiddush — Freedom of Religion for Israel, a nongovernmental organization that fights religious coercion. The group filed the petition with Israel's attorney general and the Ministry of Religious Services.

The former regulations stated that hotels that included "references to gentile holidays" would lose their kosher food licenses, a step that would make it impossible for observant Jews to stay at the hotels.

The regulations also stated that events taking place on the Sabbath and on Jewish holidays must comply with strict Jewish law. That meant a ban on filming, shooting photographs, playing music or offering laundry and ironing services. In addition, any exchange of money would have to be given "covertly" to "gentile cashiers."

Hiddush argued that the Chief Rabbinate, the sole arbiter of Jewish law in Israel, was overstepping its authority by linking kosher certification to other rules that have no bearing on whether food is kosher.

"The importance of our victory is twofold," said Rabbi Uri Regev, president and CEO of Hiddush.

"First, it will finally give the numerous Jewish and non-Jewish groups that visit Israel the freedom and respect which has been denied them by the Rabbinate's extortionist demands. And second, it is an important lesson in the development of the rule of law in Israel, which emphasizes that the Chief Rabbinate is bound by

Israeli law and is not above it.”