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Nuns walk near the seventh station of the cross on Good Friday, in the Old City of Jerusalem, April 3, 2026. (OSV News/Debbie Hill)

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The suspect indicted in the attack on a French nun working in Jerusalem as a researcher was acquitted by a Jerusalem court on the grounds that he was mentally ill.

In its Aug. 26 ruling, the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court found that while the suspect, Yona Simcha Schreiber, committed the violent attack against the nun, a psychiatric evaluation showed that he "was in a psychotic state at the time of the commission of the act and is not substantively criminally responsible."

The court also ruled that Schreiber was subject to six-year mandatory psychiatric hospitalization, noting that it "corresponds to the statutory maximum sentence for the most severe offense among those for which his commission of the act was established."

However, the court also ruled that the suspect's confinement could be reduced pending a review by the hospital's psychiatric review board.

According to the ruling, the nun's representative in court said that while they understood the reasoning behind the decision, they did not agree with it.

"We are not entirely at peace with the findings. We will respect any decision of the court," the representative said.

The nun, who worked as a researcher at the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem, was attacked April 28 near the Cenacle, the site of the Last Supper. A video posted online showed Schreiber knocking the nun to the ground and kicking her repeatedly.

Israeli police arrested Schreiber April 29, posting a video of the arrest as well as an image of the bruised right side of the injured nun’s head.

The attack drew widespread condemnation and was the latest in a series of attacks against Christians and Christian sites in the Holy Land.

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In an interview with The Associated Press following the verdict, Dominican Fr. Olivier Poquillon, the school's director, expressed his hope that Schreiber would serve the full term of his hospitalization "so that public safety can be assured, our colleague can recover psychologically, and people can live in and visit Jerusalem without fear, regardless of their belonging to any community."

However, he lamented that the attacker did not face a criminal penalty for attacking the nun.

"At the moment of the incident, his judgment was nevertheless sufficient for him to deliberately choose a Catholic nun as his victim from among all the people present," Poquillon told AP.

Benedictine Fr. Nikodemus Schnabel, abbot of Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and of Tabgha, the community’s priory on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, took to X to share the verdict and comment on the court's ruling.

"It is striking that the court explicitly clarifies that the psychiatric evaluation board is authorized to shorten the duration of the confinement at its own discretion," Schnabel noted.

Yisca Harani, founder of the Religious Freedom Data Center, a Jerusalem-based group that documents incidents affecting religious freedom, particularly against Christians, expressed concerns over the verdict, noting that mentally unstable persons can be influenced to commit such attacks.

"He is still someone who is the product of either the ignorance or the incitement that is around him," Harani told AP. "Even if he is mentally unstable, he was fed with all that anti-Christian material that is around us now."

In its most recent report, the Religious Freedom Data Center recorded an estimated 83 acts of harassment and 76 incidents against Christians in the Holy Land between April and June.