



Click here to find out more



smh.com.au

The Sydney Morning Herald

[Print this article](#) | [Close this window](#)

Israeli drug smugglers hit Australia

Jason Koutsoukis in Jerusalem
December 13, 2008

ISRAELI drug lords are increasingly targeting Australia for ecstasy smuggling, according to confidential Israel Police intelligence that shows crime syndicates view it as a booming market for the party drug.

Israeli crime syndicates control a significant share of the global ecstasy trade and have a long history of supplying the Australian market.

In March, 47-year-old Israeli man Benjamin Rosenfeld was sentenced in Sydney to 21 years' jail for importing 112 kilograms of MDMA powder, the main ingredient in ecstasy.

The shipment, valued at about \$45 million, was organised from the northern Israeli port of Haifa.

According to Israel Police, Israeli crime gangs are smuggling large quantities of ecstasy from production houses in the Netherlands, then into Belgium and Spain. From there the route can be traced through the Middle East to Thailand or Singapore, then to Australia.

"We are well aware that members of the organised families here have established connections in Australia and view it as a lucrative and growing market that they are looking to exploit," a senior member of Israel's Coastal Police central unit told the *Herald*.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the police source said that Israel Police believed organised crime gangs using couriers who carried smaller parcels of drugs.

"This has been the pattern, especially because South-East Asia and Australia are such popular destinations for Israeli backpackers when they finish military service. They are young people, so this makes it easier for criminals to try to persuade them to carry drugs."

A Thai court sentenced two Israelis to death in November after convicting them of drug smuggling. The two men were arrested as part of a major drug operation and were caught with 23,000 ecstasy pills, which had been smuggled from Europe and were destined for sale in Australia.

The US State Department identified Israel as being at the centre of the global ecstasy trade in a 2003 report and said Israeli crime organisations had obtained control of the European ecstasy market.

"Organised crime is getting stronger in Israel, not weaker. Until we get more resources here to fight the criminals ... their smuggling operations will continue to get stronger," the police source said.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, convened a special session of Parliament this week to develop a plan to combat the organised crime crisis. This followed the assassination on Monday of a senior mob figure connected to the Abutbul crime family. Another crime boss, Yaakov Alperon, 54, the head of the Alperon syndicate, was killed in a car bombing in Tel Aviv last month.

Figures presented to an inter-ministerial commission set up by the Israeli Justice Ministry showed that the country's five organised crime families turnover about \$4.6 billion a year from criminal activity.

Israeli authorities pledged to devote greater resources to fighting organised crime. An Israel Police spokesman, Micky Rosenfeld, said they were starting to make progress in a crackdown on drug smuggling.

"In recent weeks Israel Police have carried out several [successful] major operations," Mr Rosenfeld said.

Advertisement



This included the bust-up of an international cocaine ring, which led to the seizure of more than 1½ tonnes of cocaine being shipped from Peru.

However, Mr Rosenfeld disputed that Israelis had a major share of the world ecstasy market.

"Yes, there are Israeli cells operating, but our view is that it is a fairly low profile," he said.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/12/12/1228585118884.html>