

\$content.code.value

## **Israel Police probe whether foreign donations to Netanyahu were transferred to his wife, son**

**Prime Minister's former fundraiser and chief of staff summoned for second round of questioning that lasted more than 10 hours. Netanyahu: Allegations 'nothing but hot air.'**

By Yaniv Kubovich | Jul. 19, 2016 | 9:11 AM | 1

Police are investigating whether political donations made by foreign businessmen to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were transferred to the accounts of his wife and son, to be used for their personal expenses.

Ari Harow, Netanyahu's former chief of staff and one of his leading fundraisers, was summoned on Monday for a second round of questioning that lasted more than 10 hours. Harow, who is suspected of being part of this alleged fraud, was questioned for 14 hours at Ben-Gurion International Airport last week, and police expect to question him at least one more time.

Investigators are trying to determine whether this alleged transfer of funds solicited from foreigners for the Netanyahus' personal use was systematic, and whether the donors were promised anything in return. Police are also trying to ascertain how much Netanyahu knew about or was directly involved in the alleged activity.

Netanyahu responded to the ongoing inquiry into his affairs on Monday during the Knesset's version of the British Parliament's Question Time, calling the allegations "nothing but hot air."

At this point police are trying to identify Netanyahu's major international donors, particularly in the United States. To this end they are being assisted by investigations being conducted in the United States of a relative of Shlomo Rechnitz, one of Netanyahu's most prominent donors. Other donors whose names have been raised previously in other cases are also being examined.

Sources close to the investigation say that very shortly, other associates of the prime minister will be summoned to the offices of the Lahav 433 anti-corruption unit, based on information that was obtained from Harow and cross-checked.

On Friday, Channel 2's Amnon Abramovich reported that Netanyahu and possibly other members of his family were expected to be questioned under caution, meaning as criminal suspects, in the wake of Harow's questioning.

Police are also checking information about expensive gifts allegedly given to the Netanyahus, although sources say this avenue of investigation is less of a priority since receiving gifts is not necessarily a crime unless the giver was promised something in return, which may be hard to prove.

MK Yael Cohen Paran (Zionist Union) asked Netanyahu, in light of the rumors on social media, whether a false passport had been issued for his son Yair and under what circumstances citizens can have a false passport issued.

"It has been reported that a suspicion has been looked into that use has been made of a passport with a false name that the Mossad issued for your son Yair Netanyahu to open a bank account in Panama, to which hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes were directed," she stated.

"I would like to ask you," she continued, "if in fact a passport was issued with a false name for your son Yair Netanyahu; and also under what circumstances and which citizens can seek to have a passport with a false name issued? In addition, how does this affect your functioning?"

A commotion erupted in the Knesset chamber following the question, and Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein asked that it be disallowed on the grounds that it did not relate to any of the ministries for which Netanyahu is responsible, but the prime minister asked to respond anyway.

"Absolute rubbish," Netanyahu replied. "There is such a flood of talk, of nonsense, of invention, of lies, dealing with this for many years and they haven't found anything for a simple reason: There's nothing there. There wasn't anything. In this case too, there's no fire, no smoke. There's hot air."

Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit told lawmakers on Monday that publishing details about the latest investigations involving Netanyahu could damage the investigatory process.

"When I decide that there will be no damage, [information on] the matters involved will be released to the public," he told the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee. "The public has a right to know, and it is very important, but there is an obligation to investigate properly."

U.S.-born Harow served as Netanyahu's bureau chief from February 2009 to March 2010. It was in March 2010, after leaving that position, that he set up a private consulting and business development firm called 3H Global. In September 2013, before returning to the Prime Minister's Office as chief of staff, Harow pledged to sever his ties with the company. He left the Prime Minister's Office again in January 2015.

About a week and a half ago, Haaretz reported on police suspicions that Harow was involved in a fictitious transaction for the sale for \$3 million of 3H Global.