



**Dear Colleagues:**

The quadrennial Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar for Jewish Education is presented through the generous donation of the late Rosita and Estaban de Herczeg to ICJW. This year's Seminar examined **"Judaism as a Universal Language: Jewish**

**Perspectives on Contemporary Issues"** and we are delighted to share with you in this newsletter highlights from this outstanding program.

While we may think that many of today's contemporary issues are new, on examining them we find that many of the same issues and dilemmas were challenges for our forefathers and foremothers. The context in which the challenges were faced may well be different in the age of internet and social media, but the challenge to adapt to the present while remaining true to the past was their challenge just as it remains ours today.

One of the subjects explored during the May 2013 Seminar was "The Eternal Relevance of Judaism". As Jews we have been challenged, we have been vilified, we have been expelled, we have been shunned – but we remain undaunted. We are relevant and we remain united.

We hope that you will enjoy reading about the Herczeg Seminar and the other activities of ICJW around the world.

With best wishes,

**Sharon Gustafson,  
 President, ICJW**

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## Judaism as a Universal Language: Jewish Perspectives on Contemporary Issues

When planning the Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar for Jewish Education, we felt that it was interesting and important for female Jewish leaders to explore contemporary issues of universal concern as they appear in Jewish sources.



Photo: Mel Brickman

We believe that the ideas contained in the Torah are not historic and anachronistic but remain relevant to today and tomorrow. In order to ensure the continuation of Jewish traditions, we need to understand them and know how to take them with us into the future.

The Seminar title says "Jewish Perspectives" in the plural because Judaism embraces a multiplicity of views, as can be seen on any page of the Talmud, with all views coming from the same source. The Torah leaves space and empowers each of us to add our own interpretation of the Jewish sources on contemporary issues. In order to use this space in clever and useful ways, we should know our sources.

In today's on-going Jewish conversation, there are many opportunities for women to add their voices. As we campaign for equality, we should be informed about our Jewish identity and how to retain our authenticity as Jewish women. Our voice is unique and much needed in today's aggressive world. As women, we know how to build and to cooperate, how to encourage and invest. We can contribute empathy and partnership. Now is the time to talk intelligently and to use these feminine skills for the good of society.

Activism based on knowledge is the feminine way to build a better world. We can only hope to secure a viable Jewish future if we can contribute an authentic Jewish female voice to the dialogue taking place around us. We hope that you will enjoy reading about the Seminar and take away some practical ideas and Jewish perspectives.

**Rina Cohen,  
 Co-Chairman, Herczeg Jerusalem Education Seminar**



# International Vigil for Women's Rights

*On the day between the ICJW Executive Meeting and the opening of the Herczeg Education Seminar in Jerusalem, women from around the world took the opportunity to hold a vigil outside the Knesset, Israel's parliament building.*



Photo: Ariane Liman.

50 women representing 20 countries stood in silent protest, dressed in white and holding placards and flags, to demand equal rights for women in the Jewish community, equality in marriage, and freedom of expression at the Western Wall and other public spaces. The vigil was reported on Israeli television and in Jewish newspapers around the world.

Under the slogan “Jewish Women Worldwide Demand Equality”, ICJW women expressed their concerns about a number of issues, including:

- The under-representation of women in Jewish community leadership positions worldwide;
- Inequality in marriage, including the right to marry, equality within marriage, and the challenges faced when dissolving a marriage, including obtaining a halachic divorce (get);
- The insensitivity of Batei Din (Rabbinical Courts) around the world to the concerns of women, and particularly the failure of efforts to apply halachic solutions in cases of Agunot (get refusal);
- The exclusion and marginalization of women at Jewish community events and in public spaces, including buses, public sidewalks and billboards in Israel.
- Limitations on women's religious expression at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

“We felt that Jerusalem was the obvious place for the women of ICJW to raise their concerns”, explains ICJW President Sharon Gustafson, who led the vigil outside the Knesset. “Our Executive was holding its biannual meeting at the focal point of the Jewish world, at a time when women's rights are high on both local and international agendas. ICJW represents the major Jewish women's organizations around the world, and our campaign for women's equality in each of these communities resonates most strongly here in Israel.”



# Freedom of Worship in Jerusalem

*Naomi Tsur, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and pioneer of the city's Green Pilgrimage campaign, spoke at the Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar about the ethics of the public domain.*



Photo: Mel Brickman

Deputy Mayor Naomi Tsur was one of the guest speakers at the Seminar's opening event on Mount Herzl, and led a workshop on social justice in public spaces on the last day of the Seminar.

She expressed her excitement at meeting Jewish women who occupy leadership positions all over the world and who share a strong bond. She spoke about her Green Pilgrimage campaign to enable accessible and sustainable pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which remains a popular destination for people of all faiths. Part of this campaign involves ensuring freedom of worship in the public spaces of the city, which has become a particularly hot issue in Jerusalem.

“In recent months we have seen a series of scandals involving confrontations between different groups in the city. Women who have campaigned to be able to pray dressed as they choose at the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, have been arrested. There have been incidents of graffiti scrawled on churches, and verbal and spitting attacks on members of other faiths. This is clearly not a responsible use of the city that we took control of in 1967, in which we have always tried to guarantee freedom of religion.

“In truth, Jerusalem is a successful multi-cultural city and most interactions in our streets are peaceful. We have laws and ethical and moral rules to ensure tolerance, but we see that liberalism always gives way in the face of intolerance. In any head-on clash between civil liberties and religious dogmatism, the extremists tend to win. That is why it is important for Jewish women to join forces to help to deal with these problems.”

Naomi went on to lead a discussion about rules for the public domain. ICJW women from around the world were encouraged to contribute their ideas as to the terms of an ethical code which the Deputy Mayor hopes to introduce in Jerusalem, to ensure the respectful treatment of all who live in or visit the holy city.

Quoting from the biblical book of Kings, she read the prayer that King Solomon said at the opening of the Temple in Jerusalem, when he prayed that both Jews and non-Jews would find spirituality and meaning in our places of worship.



משהו טוב קורה בירושלים!

*City Slogan: Something Good is Happening in Jerusalem*



# Protecting the Rights

***Professor Ruth Halperin-Kaddari heads the Ruth & Emanuel Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women at Bar Ilan University in Israel and headed the Advisory Committee to the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office. She is also vice chairperson of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).***

As an expert in family law, women's rights, religion and politics, she was perhaps uniquely qualified to address the Herzeg Education Seminar about Jewish perspectives on women's rights, and her lecture was one of the most popular and animated sessions of the Seminar.

"Sitting on the CEDAW committee at the UN enables me to compare Israel with other countries. All of the countries in the world report to CEDAW with the notable exceptions of Somalia, Sudan, Iran and the United States, who have refused to join. The main issue around the world is gender-based violence, and we can see that women in "developed" countries around the world experience similar problems, such as the under-representation of women in the public sector and government.

"The difference between Israel and other Western countries is really rooted in attitudes to the status of women in religious law, and issues arising from Israel's military establishment. Because of the dominant role that the Israeli army plays in the life of the country, it impacts the socialization of young men and women during their military service, and it limits the advancement of women in leadership roles, because men in ranking positions in the army go on to dominate Israeli politics and government.

"The problem here is not Judaism or halacha (Jewish law) but those who control and enforce them, especially in Israel. There is no separation of religion and state in Israel. Religion plays a major role in the lives of Israeli citizens, who are identified by their religion and limited in who and where they can marry, even if they are not religiously observant. Religious laws are implemented by all the religious courts in Israel in patriarchal ways, and these courts have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce.

"Women in Africa and the Muslim world find themselves in a similar situation. I find it illuminating to talk to feminist Muslims, in Israel and at the UN, because we share the same frustrations in our struggle to find solutions within our religious texts and to overcome patriarchal control over their interpretation and implementation.



*Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari answering questions from delegates*



*Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari receives her certificate from Carole Slater (l) and Aviva Kohlmann (r)*

“On the issue of Agunot, I believe that solutions do exist. Jewish law is not frozen – the Rabbis have always found ways to adapt to modern challenges, such as enabling the charging of interests on loans throughout the Israeli banking system. There are mechanisms within halacha that allow for the legitimate circumvention of the law, and we need to keep pushing for equivalent mechanisms to be introduced in the case of Agunot – women whose husbands refuse to grant them a divorce. The religious courts claim that there are no solutions, but that is because they have been given absolute power in the area of marriage and divorce, and the combination of religion and politics has frozen women out of the system.

“We are working in Israel to change the system for the appointment of religious judges (Dayanim) and I dream that one day women will sit as judges in Israel’s religious courts. There is a group of women’s organizations who are cooperating to help make changes, such as becoming involved in the appointment of the Chief Rabbi and challenging the balance of religiosity in the courts. It may help if Jewish women from around the world were to lobby the Israeli government on some of these issues.”

In the discussion which followed her lecture, Professor Halperin-Kaddari offered to share response literature on the issue of Agunot on the ICJW website, so that women from different affiliates can access the material and use it in their local campaigns on this issue.

***See page 11 for an update on ICJW’s International Jewish Women’s Rights Project.***

## ICJW Elected to World Jewish Congress



*Photos: Mel Brickman*

In a dramatic announcement, having flown directly to Israel from the Plenary Assembly of the World Jewish Congress in Budapest, Past President of ICJW Sara Winkowski announced her appointment as a Vice-President on the WJC Executive Committee representing ICJW.

For the first time in its history, the World Jewish Congress has elected two women’s organizations to their Executive Committee – ICJW and WIZO. ICJW was elected with 191 out of a possible 253 votes.

Transcripts of the Herzeg Jerusalem Education Seminar sessions can be found on the ICJW website under the heading "Education & Training".



# Human Trafficking

***Marni Besser explains why and how ICJW members should get involved in the local and global fight against human trafficking.***

Our Jewish texts teach us that we are responsible for the treatment of our neighbours, so we cannot stand idly by as human trafficking continues. Many verses in Deuteronomy mandate Jewish people to respect strangers in our communities and to protect the rights of widows and orphans, because we were once slaves in Egypt. The great Jewish scholar Maimonides explained that freeing captives (pidyon sh'vuyim) is the most important mitzvah (good deed), because they suffer from hunger, thirst, nakedness, and mortal danger.

Human trafficking is the exploitation of human beings and it is prevalent all over the world in different forms, including debt bondage, child soldiers, sexual exploitation, organ trafficking, forced labor and servitude. Not only adults are exploited; children under the age of 10 can be found working in brothels and carrying weapons.

There are many actions that we can take – both as individuals and as affiliates – that can have an impact and change the face and nature of human trafficking in our communities. We must recognize that this is a major global criminal phenomenon, second only to the drugs trade, according the United Nations. Secondly, human trafficking is an activity common to all of our countries. Our first step should be to access the current information about human trafficking by reading the relevant part of the “2012 Trafficking in Persons Report”, published online by the United States State Department. There you will find specific information on how well the three P’s are undertaken in your country. These measure each nation’s performance on Prevention, Prosecution and Protection, and this will guide you in creating an action plan to fight human trafficking.



Photos courtesy of Stop The Traffik



ICJW has campaigned on the issue of slavery since its foundation. Bertha Pappenheim, founder of the German League of Jewish Women in the early 1900s, was effective in stopping girls from getting on railroad trains to be prostituted in far-off communities. The fight to end human trafficking continues and has become more complex, due to the ease of global communications and travel. It is essential that we, as members of ICJW, fulfil our obligation and continue the fight.



## ICJW Action Points

- Find out about the key anti-trafficking organizations in your area and which forms of human trafficking they are concerned with.
- Find out what laws are in force in your country to combat human trafficking and any proposed legislation that you can support and lobby for.
- Discuss this human rights issue with your Rabbi.
- Meet with other faith-based community groups who share the same philosophy.
- Link with local anti-trafficking groups and share activity strategies.
- Plan programs and invite local law enforcement officials as speakers.
- Provide opportunities for discussion through book clubs reading novels about human trafficking, and viewing relevant movies.
- Educate young people on the complex crime of sexual human trafficking in order to encourage vigilance, discourage demand, and foster an understanding of gender equality.
- If you have the ability to meet with government (on a municipal, state/provincial/territorial, or federal level), take the opportunity to push for funding and service programs for the victims of human trafficking.



*Marni Besser is President of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada and sits on the ICJW Committee on the Status of Women.*



## Making Life Easier in Havana

The presence of Jews in Cuba can be traced to 1492, when Luis de Torres arrived with other Jews and ‘Conversos’ escaping from the Spanish Inquisition. Jewish immigration to the island increased at the end of the 18th and early 19th century, reaching 15,000 before Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, when most fled to the United States. Today there are an estimated 1,500 Jews living in Cuba.



sometimes tea in the afternoon provided to the participants.

Our members give the best of themselves, having created a warm Jewish community sisterhood through their love and responsibility. The success of women’s leadership in Cuba, as elsewhere, is based on the values of an

The first Jewish women’s organization was founded in 1917 as the Ezra Societ-Menora Sisterhood, or “Yidisher Froein Farin”, today known as the Asociación Femenina Hebrea de Cuba – ICJW’s affiliate on the island – was founded in 1926. They are based at the Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba, the Jewish community center in the capital, Havana, and welcome women of all ages. They address diverse subjects relating to women such as violence, civil rights, health, current affairs and Jewish traditions, and at each meeting they include some entertainment and give a small present to the participants. They rely on the financial support of the three synagogues in Havana, B’nai Brith, and the American Joint Distribution Committee (known as “The Joint”), as well as items donated by visitors and supporters.

educated woman, and her ability to transmit these values to her children. Although The Joint has been sending Conservative Rabbis to Cuba since 1992 to provide for the community’s religious needs, in the absence of a permanent Rabbi, most of the community’s religious leaders are women, and women play an important supporting role in festivities and Shabbat services all year round.



*Sara Yaech and Frida Zygmán represented the Asociación Femenina Hebrea de Cuba at ICJW’s 16th Regional Workshop for the Jewish Women of Latin America, in Barranquilla, Colombia, in February 2013.*

The Asociación also supports community activities for senior citizens in projects organized by the three synagogues in Havana, including art, dance, theater, ceramics and exercise classes, with breakfast, lunch and



# FOCUS: CUBA

## Projects

The Asociación Femenina Hebrea de Cuba has introduced three very successful projects over the past four years.

**Challot Project:** Once a month, a group of women and men meet at the community center to make challah (traditional Jewish bread) to be distributed to local Jewish families for Shabbat. This program is supported by The Joint, which also helps the group to prepare Hamentashen cakes for Purim and cookies for Chanukah.

**“Beauty Day” Project:** A mobile beauty parlor visits one of the three Havana synagogues for one day each month, with eight women on hand to offer haircuts and dyeing, manicures, pedicures, and eyebrow treatments. All the equipment has been donated by friends and visitors, which makes it possible for local women to visit the beauty parlor free of charge. Donations are requested to cover the cost of materials and to help with transportation for people who cannot reach the synagogue because of health problems.

**Yadisha Craft Workshop:** A recreational and fundraising venture, teaching community members different craft skills: making handbags, challah covers for Shabbat, different knitted items, and handmade jewelry. Everything is sold and the money raised helps to cover the Asociación's expenses and charitable activities.



*The reconstructed Synagogue at the Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba.*



*Refurbishment of the entrance to the Sephardic Hebrew Center in Havana.*

*Based on a report by Sara Yaech, translated from Spanish by Sara Winkowski*

# AFFILIATE FOCUS: Bulgaria

## Celebrating and Preserving Bulgaria's Jewish Heritage



Bulgaria is a small country situated in south-east Europe, occupying the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. To the north it borders Romania, to the west the Republics of Macedonia and Serbia, to the east the Black Sea, to the south Greece, and to the southeast, Turkey. This makes it a historical crossroads for various civilizations and it is home to some of the earliest religious and cultural artifacts in the world.

The first Jews appeared in the Balkans as early as the 2nd century, after the conquest of their lands by Rome, and they were known as the “Romaniotes”. The really large influx of Jews to the Balkans began after 1492, when they were driven out of Spain and found a tolerant welcome from the Ottoman government and Bulgarian population. These Sephardic migrants spoke Judeo Spanish and constituted 90% of the Bulgarian Jews. They have contributed greatly to all spheres of life in Bulgaria's multi-cultural society. The fall of the Communist government in 1989 has encouraged the free revival of Judaism, alongside Christianity and Islam.

According to the organization of the Jewish community in Bulgaria, “Shalom”, there are 6,000 Jews in Bulgaria, half of whom live in the capital Sofia. The main Sofia synagogue, opened officially in 1909 in the presence of Tsar Ferdinand I of Bulgaria, is the largest Sephardic synagogue in south-eastern Europe and the third largest synagogue in Europe. It also houses the Jewish Historical Museum. The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation runs Bulgaria's Hebrew School, which has an excellent reputation and includes the ORT Technological Center for computer sciences and high-tech educational programs.

Living under a Communist regime for 45 years, people were nervous to admit that they were Jewish because they were afraid of losing their positions. With the fall of Communism, they have gained total freedom of expression and religion, but lost a major part of their economy. Bulgaria is a poor country whose citizens work very hard for low salaries, with poor healthcare and childcare, and receive low pensions when they retire.

The Bulgarian Council of Jewish Women (CJWB) was started in 2004. It runs various social activities designed to



*Interior of the main Sofia synagogue*

alleviate the difficult economic situation among members of the Jewish community, including delivering food to those who are housebound. They run a successful Rosh Chodesh educational group for women and an annual educational weekend seminar. Liliane Seidman, ICJW's European Region Chair, was invited by CJWB President, Lika Eshkenazi, to participate in this seminar in June 2012 and to give lectures about the Jews of Belgium and about ICJW.

CJWB's members are interested in their Jewish heritage and want to pass it on to the next generation. They plan to set up a new project to interview Jewish people all over Bulgaria about their past and their traditions, and non-Jewish people who hid or helped Jews during World War II. This will enable them to create an educational program to teach their history to future generations, before the last witnesses disappear.

National commemorative events were held in March 2013 to mark the 70th anniversary of the decision of the Bulgarian government to refuse permission to the Nazi occupiers to deport Bulgarian Jews. All the Jewish organizations in Bulgaria took on projects to help the general population as an expression of their gratitude for that decision. The CJWB donated 15 sets of bedding to a Christian orphanage, in appreciation of the Orthodox Church's support for the Jewish community.



# ICJW Prize Recognizes Research on Agunot

*The second International Council of Jewish Women Academic Research Prize has been awarded to Dr. Nechama Hadari of the UK for her research on the issue of get and halachic divorce.*



Dr. Hadari is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies, but wrote her PhD thesis while studying at the University of Manchester's Agunah Research Unit. The title of her thesis was: *"Towards a definition of will in the context of the granting of a halachic divorce,"* and

it has resulted in the publication of a book entitled *"The Kosher Get – A Halakhic Story of Divorce."*

Leah Aharonov, Immediate Past President of ICJW and Chairperson of the ICJW Research Prize Committee, explained the decision to award this prize to Dr. Hadari:

"Helping Agunot – women who are denied a religious divorce by their husbands – has long been a campaign priority of the International Council of Jewish Women. The Prize Committee determined that Nechama Hadari's research offers a constructive and creative approach to finding new solutions within the halachic system in order to help women who are trapped in failed marriages."

The ICJW Research Prize includes a \$1,000 honorarium and is awarded every four years to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution in original research on a topic that advances an understanding of the role of Jewish women, addresses a way to improve the situation of Jewish women, and/or evaluates the place of women within the predominantly male leadership structures in Jewish life.

For details of *"The Kosher Get"* (including a downloadable chapter) see <http://www.legaltheory.demon.co.uk/ARU5.htm>

## IJWRP Report 2013

ICJW's International Jewish Women's Rights Project was launched in 1998 and is committed to restoring justice and fairness to the Jewish divorce process for women. Its chair, Sharon Shenhav, attends meetings about the issue of women's rights in Judaism all over the world. In January 2013, she lectured on this topic to the Jewish community in Quito at an event organized by ICJW's Ecuador affiliate, and at a Conservative synagogue in Phoenix, Arizona, courtesy of the local NCJW affiliate.

To mark International Agunot Day in February 2013, Sharon was hosted as scholar-in-residence by a Modern Orthodox community in Los Angeles, where she talked about the problem of Agunot and the future of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel. She then flew to Vienna, Austria, to participate in the 6th International Bet Debora Conference of European Jewish Women Activists, Academics, Rabbis and Cantors. She spoke about "Discrimination Against Jewish Women in Religious Divorce" and participated in a panel on "Ambivalent Success: Women Activists in Jewish Communities", alongside women from Russia, Bulgaria, Austria and Germany. Sharon was also interviewed on Austrian radio and television and by the Vienna newspaper, where she spoke about the importance of helping Agunot and raising awareness of this important issue around the world.



# Historic Resolution on Preventing Violence Against Women

*The 57th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York in March 2013 created a historic consensus on the prevention of violence against women.*



Before the meeting, ICJW submitted a written statement to the CSW expressing concern about the issue and recommending the training of community counselors and the establishment one-stop service centers to help the victims of violence.

Alongside the official deliberations of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the NGO Committee on the Status of Women organizes the CSW Forum - a series of activities for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss improving the status of women. Over 5,000 NGO delegates came to New York representing over 500 NGOs worldwide, and ICJW co-sponsored two well-attended and successful events.

Dr. Joan Lurie Goldberg, ICJW Representative to the UN in New York, co-moderated a panel organized in conjunction with UN Watch entitled “Profiles in Courage: Human Rights Defenders in the Struggle to End Violence Against Women”. The speakers, who represented three different religions, had each borne witness to horrific violence and torture of women in Syria, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Working together with the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), ICJW co-sponsored another event entitled “StoP the Cycle:

Strategies to Prevent Violence Against Girls”. Madeleine Brecher, ICJW Representative to the UN in New York and Secretary of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, welcomed the audience and explained the work of ICJW and ARS. The panel discussed practical ideas for actually breaking the cycle of violence, with audience members sharing their own experiences and ideas.

At the end of the two-week CSW event, 131 countries approved the Agreed Conclusions on global standards for action to prevent violence against women and girls. This document urges all countries to “strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls and to refrain from invoking any custom, tradition and religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination”. It reaffirms that women and men have the right to enjoy all human rights on an equal basis, recommitments governments to comprehensive sex education, calls for sexual and reproductive health services, such as emergency contraception and safe abortion for victims of violence, and calls on governments to criminalize violence against women and punish gender-related killings.



Madeleine Brecher said: “These Agreed Conclusions represent an important step toward ensuring that all women and girls around the world live safe lives free from the scourge of violence and abuse.

ICJW is delighted that the Agreed Conclusions addressed trafficking in persons and its prevention, which is one of our priority issues. We must pledge to continue our vital work to ensure that women and girls around the globe receive the safety and dignity they deserve.”

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## ICJW Calendar 2013-2014

November 5-6	Executive Meeting, Chicago, U.S.A.
May 2-4, 2014	Executive Meeting, Prague, Czech Republic
May 4-7, 2014	Quadrennial Convention of ICJW, Prague
May 8, 2014	Executive Meeting, Prague

