



# Links

FALL 2009

## Rosh Hashanah Message



Dear Friends,

As we complete the cycle of one year and begin anew, we have the opportunity both to reflect back and to plan ahead. Among the holidays that best manifests this is Simchat Torah, when we complete the reading of the entire Torah and immediately begin reading it again. While we, unlike the Torah, are not infinite, the lesson is clear. As we mark the past, we must prepare for the future.

This year, ICJW marks 60 years of the reconstitution of our organization in Paris in 1949. It is awe-inspiring to think that this took place so soon after the decimation of the Jewish people during World War II. We can attribute this initiative to the same caliber of female leaders, who already in the early 1900s had conceived the idea of an international Jewish women's organization and began working toward its formation. We revel in their accomplishments and are inspired by their actions. Their first steps will be celebrated at the upcoming ICJW Convention in Cape Town in May 2010, when we will mark a century of Jewish women's achievement through ICJW, and deliberate on how to follow in their footsteps.

Looking back over the past year, two new ICJW initiatives are especially gratifying. We awarded the first ICJW Research Prize to a young woman scholar who is investigating a topic of relevance to Jewish women everywhere. At the ICJW Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar, we launched the Bea Zucker Online Bible Course, the second series of feminist-oriented study sources available on the ICJW website. Apropos the High Holy Days, I refer you to Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman's session on Parashat Vayera, in which the power of women's prayer and their willingness to sacrifice are discussed.

As always, the community work of ICJW affiliates is the chain that connects us all, and some inspiring examples are highlighted in this issue of LINKS.

As we enter a new cycle of ICJW activities, may the good deeds reflected in the work of our members around the world merit our inscription for a happy, healthy, and productive new year.

Wishing you and your families *Shana Tova veKetivah veChatimah Tova*,

**Leah Aharonov**  
President, International Council of Jewish Women

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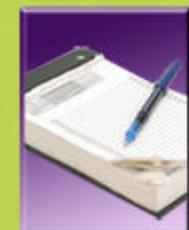
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## COMMUNITY SERVICES REPORT



This edition of ICJW Links tells of ongoing community service work around the world under the auspices of ICJW. As ICJW Community Services Coordinator, I warmly commend the ICJW affiliate organisations on which I have reported here, their innovative ideas and resultant community service work have immensely improved the lives of women and children in their regions of the world.

**Robyn Lenn OAM**  
ICJW Community Services Coordinator

**FRANCE**

Evelyn Ascot, ICJW Vice-President for France, reports that Coopération Féminine, ICJW's French affiliate based in Paris, is involved with community services of many types. The Coopération Féminine is affiliated with the FSJU (Unified Jewish Social Fund) and also works with WIZO to run a hotline for female victims of violence. They also run another hotline to assist parents who are encountering problems with their children at school.

The organization's Les Ateliers de la Cooperation provide useful work for up to 85 mentally handicapped people; it ensures that their families receive valuable support by arranging regular gatherings and enjoyable activities, as well as sponsoring a yearly summer camp.

The Coopération Féminine also works with Jewish schoolchildren with academic and behavioral problems and visits the elderly in need of home support. It organizes weekly meetings called Friendship Clubs for the seniors, and its volunteers also visit prisons and assist at a daycare program for people with dementia at the Edith Kremsdorf Center.

## NETHERLANDS



The Dutch National Council of Jewish Women was established in 1998 by successfully combining four existing Jewish women's organizations. In June 2008, the organization celebrated its 10th anniversary with a gathering of 60 women to view and discuss the film "A Price Above Rubies", a film dealing with the difficulties of an unhappy marriage in the orthodox Jewish community. They also held a tea party with music from Kochawiem (pictured).

President Mieke van Praag explains that NCJW Netherlands has permanent representation to the Dutch Women's Council. Their work includes promoting the status of Jewish and non-Jewish women, and encouraging friendly relations and understanding between Jewish and non-Jewish women in the Netherlands and, particularly, dialogue between Jewish and Muslim women.

Their community activities include fundraising to support Yad Elie in Israel, which provides food for poor families and hot meals for elementary school students in West and East Jerusalem.

## SPAIN

Eva Benatar reports from the Consejo Español de Mujeres Israelitas (CEMI) that their community activities this year ended with a lunch in appreciation of Grandparents. CEMI sponsored five local children to attend summer camps this year, and they have raised and sent 2500 Euros to Akim, an organization which supports the disabled in Israel.

## BRAZIL

The [Liga Feminina Israelita do Brasil \( LFIB \)](#) - the League of Jewish Women of Brazil, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. President Ester Schwartz explains: "In 50 years of voluntary work, we have conscientiously tried to reduce the mistreatment of Brazilian women, through our participation in all areas of community life and by motivating women to take effective social action."

This Rio de Janeiro-based organization works in cooperation with a long list of organizations, including hospitals and groups specializing in gynecological, maternity and adolescent problems. LFIB's goal is to improve conditions for women and to create the development of better healthcare in the communities where they live, by cooperating with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

LFIB community service projects include the Citizenship for Women project, which supports women from needy communities and deals with the problems encountered by women in charge of household finances. The project aims not only to promote financial independence but also to raise these women's self-esteem through cultural initiatives.

Their Professionalization Passport to Complete Citizenship project began in 2004, aiming to give skills to women from the needy communities of Rio de Janeiro. In the past five years, this project has reached hundreds of women, assisting them to make a place for themselves in the job market. The LFIB created and funded this project completely, and its responsibilities include managing the locations, teachers, working materials, tools, transportation, and marketing the handcrafted products they produce.



The various groups run by LFIB (pictured here) have successfully sold their products at market fairs in Rio, at the largest charity fair in Rio de Janeiro's "Feira da Providencia", and even at Rio de Janeiro's Fashion Week, with sales to businesses throughout Brazil and other countries. With a method of earning their own money, the project participants have gained a broader vision of their capabilities and their ability to influence their own communities.

Since 1976, LFIB has run its Children's Citizenship Project, creating opportunities for children in needy

communities by building and supporting quality professional and day-care centers, pre-schools and educational programs for children. LFIB also installed youth libraries in the municipal schools of Rio de Janeiro, giving each school between 500 and 2000 books by the best national and international authors.

LFIB's Health and Life Project is run in partnership with other NGOs and the Mario Kroeff Hospital and Gamboa Hospital. Since 1999, the Liga Feminina Israelita do Brasil has sponsored gynecological cancer prevention and screening programs for women from needy communities. The project sponsors a well-equipped mobile unit which visits each community accompanied by three doctors and two nurses. Thanks to this successful project, 90% of the women in the targeted communities have now been screened.

## UNITED STATES

[NCJW-USA](#), now 115 years old, operates in more than 100 areas of the United States. We have chosen to focus on the [Seattle Section's](#) valuable community service project "Shalom Bayit - Furnishing Peaceful Homes."

This program is the only furniture bank exclusively for survivors of domestic violence in Washington state. Since its inception in 2001, "Shalom Bayit" has received over 9,800 pieces of quality used furniture from more than 1,200 donors, and has helped over 600 families settle comfortably and with dignity into new homes and renewed lives. ninety five per cent of Shalom Bayit's clients are not Jewish, and come from a wide variety of ethnic, racial, religious and economic backgrounds.

Each month, NCJW Seattle members hold a volunteer day at the Shalom Bayit furniture bank warehouse, where members of all ages assist with sorting and organising donated household goods and furniture.

With this program, NCJW Seattle is making a tangible difference in the lives of women and children fleeing domestic violence, utilizing volunteers without duplicating other women's services. The furniture bank has become an integral part of the continuum of services for domestic violence survivors in King County and is the recipient of the King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence's "Take Action Against Domestic Violence" award.

## CANADA

[National Council of Jewish Women of Canada](#) Toronto Section was established in 1897. Toronto Section has been a catalyst for change and a powerful pioneering force on behalf of children, youth, the elderly, families, the disabled, new Canadians and the disadvantaged.

More than 21,400 Jews in Toronto live on or below the poverty line. Over 4,000 children live in poverty and go to school hungry, and many read below their class level. Almost one third of Jewish elderly live below the poverty line, and two thirds of these are women. Each year, NCJWC Toronto's Annual Passover Food Drive assists over 10,000 members of their community.

The Toronto Jewish Quilting Project makes quilts as support gifts for people touched by cancer. NCJW volunteers, even those who have not quilted before, meet regularly at Council House to sew the quilts by hand.

The NCJW Council Awareness Players are a volunteer group of actors and authors who seek to educate through informative entertainment of the community. Each short play provokes lively audience discussion, which is led by a facilitator. They present a series of short skits on staying heart-healthy, and another presentation entitled "Six Vignettes on Elder Abuse", which provides realistic portraits of family life in which elder abuse occurs, bringing the issue to the attention of the community.

## SOUTH AFRICA

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) provides services to the Jewish community and to the broader South African population. They believe that it is important to participate in effecting change and upliftment in their country via their various initiatives, harnessing the power of women and recognizing the critical role that they can play.

In the Western Cape, the UJW runs an edu-care centre for underprivileged children in the Maitland/Kensington area. This originally started as a soup kitchen in the 1940s and has grown into a facility for 85 children, who receive three meals a day and a solid foundation for their future education. The UJW funds scholarships and bursaries for both Jewish and non-Jewish students, and runs regular adult education talks by expert speakers. Their Women's Resource Centre provides counseling services for abused and traumatized women in the Jewish community and runs counseling groups for female prisoners.

UJW Western Cape runs a Yad Sarah loan service for medical items like wheelchairs and walkers, and a twice weekly Friendship Club for the elderly, including subsidized lunches. The UJW hosts a bingo games party for senior citizen clubs from Kayalitsha, Gugulethu and other areas at their house in Sea Point, where they are hosted for morning tea by women from the various local UJW groups.

There are 12 groups of Jewish women in the Western Cape who are committed to making a difference in the communities in which they live. They choose which local charity projects to support and actively fundraise to provide all kinds of assistance to hospitals, old age homes, HIV and Aids clinics, rape crisis and trauma centers and children's homes.

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## ICJW Research Prize Awarded to French Researcher



The first ICJW Women's Academic Research Prize was awarded in May 2009 to Béatrice de Gasquet from France, who received a certificate of recognition and a \$1000 honorarium.

Launched in November 2008, the ICJW Women's Research Prize is awarded 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.

Béatrice is studying for a French Doctorate in Sociology at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris. Her winning research project is entitled: "Do you ask the women why they don't go up to the Torah? Gender as a Political and Ritual Issue in Two French Progressive Synagogues."

Based on ethnographical fieldwork carried out at Reform and Masorti communities in Paris, her dissertation examines the practice of gender equality within these synagogues, and evaluates the place of women within their leadership structures, especially in their rituals and on their synagogue boards. It shows how equal rights do not automatically translate into an equal representation of men and women in synagogue life, how women take on new roles in synagogues, and what it means to them.

Submissions for the ICJW award were received from Israel, France, Australia, Italy and Argentina, on topics relating to Jewish history, poetry, education, art and medicine. Leah Aharonov, President of ICJW, explains the decision to award this prize: "We know that there is much still to be learned about the role of Jewish women and from the role of Jewish women in Jewish life. ICJW views this prize as a vehicle of recognition for those academics who have chosen to delve deeper into these topics, within the broader context of highlighting the significance and effectiveness of Jewish women within their communities."

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## ACTION ALERTS

### The UN GEAR Campaign



ICJW is supporting a campaign to transform the United Nations into an organization that really works for all women. GEAR stands for Gender Equality Architecture Reform and calls on governments to support the creation and funding of a stronger new women's "entity" within the UN system which can deliver results. The campaign is being driven by women's organizations, who are calling for a women's entity that has:

- Universal field presence and a strong policy and programmatic mandate.
- An Under-Secretary-General as its director, to more effectively drive the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.
- Substantial and predictable resources, with initial funding of \$1 billion USD.
- Accountability, at both national and international levels, through the meaningful involvement of women's NGOs.
- A mandate to strengthen the UN's gender equality machinery and encourage the integration of gender equality and women's human rights throughout the UN and especially in the UN Country Teams and in all UN reform processes.

More information about this campaign can be found at <http://www.gear.collectivex.com/>

### Progress on Fighting Trafficking in Australia

In 2007 ICJW issued a call for its Affiliates to work on the issue of trafficking in whatever ways they could ([click here for details](#)).

The [National Council of Jewish Women Australia \(NCJWA\)](#) responded by holding events in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia to raise awareness about trafficking, and invited other groups to attend.

An NCJWA group in Victoria met regularly to educate themselves about trafficking. They also held a public forum on the trafficking of women. One of the most disturbing aspects of the forum was when a tape of trafficked women's voices was played, with fragments of their stories and expressions of desperation.

NCJWA in Western Australia joined with the National Council of Women to screen an Australian film on trafficking – "The Jammed" - and followed this with a panel discussion. Special guests included the Director of the Office for Women's Policy and the Coordinator of Domestic Violence Advocacy Service. Their discussion covered the need for increased community awareness and for improved programs to help health and welfare workers to identify victims, as well as the importance of

focusing on prevention, and on developing victim recovery programs which provide support, advocacy and education.

The Sydney section of NCJWA held a similar forum in 2008 on International Human Rights Day. Three speakers from local organizations involved in grassroots work informed the meeting about the current plight of trafficked victims. One inspirational speaker was the founder of the Anti-Slavery Project in Australia, who explained how women are trafficked and outlined government responses at policy and legal levels.

Dr. Anne Morris, Co-Chair of ICJW's Standing Committee for the Status of Women, says: "It is appropriate that Jewish women concern themselves with these issues, for as Jews we know how easily groups of people can become victimized, and how much their future depends on the actions and concern of others. The rights of all are only as strong as those of the most vulnerable."

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## CALENDAR EVENTS

<b>November 8-9, 2010</b>	Administrative Meeting in Prague, Czech Republic
<b>November 25, 2009</b>	International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
<b>February 7-8, 2010</b>	Administrative Meeting in Israel
<b>March 8, 2010</b>	International Women's Day
<b>March 20, 2010</b>	International Agunot Day (Fast of Esther)
<b>May 6-12, 2010</b>	Convention & Executive Meetings in Cape Town, South Africa

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## WEBSITE NEWS

The latest addition to the ICJW website is an exciting interactive Online Bible Study Program, entitled "The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives". It brings together diverse Jewish and literary sources with a feminist theme, with a different Parasha (weekly portion) presented for discussion each month. This three-year course is being written by Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman for Bar Ilan University's Rappaport Center of Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality, who also wrote the [Biblical Women](#) course.

Monthly installments of the new Bible study program are available to download in English and Spanish, and there is an [Online Forum](#) where participants can discuss the course material with women around the world. We already know of groups of women in North and Latin America who are meeting to study together, and many individual women who are enjoying downloading and reading the sources at home. We urge you to [log on](#) and try it for yourself!

Funding for this new interactive Online Bible Study Program has been provided by the Zucker family of Switzerland in memory of Beatrice Zucker, who was a Life Member of ICJW. She was dedicated to the dissemination of Jewish knowledge, particularly among women who had no opportunity for a formal Jewish education.

[Click here](#) to read Vera Kronenberg's speech at the launch of the Program at the Herczeg Jerusalem Educational Conference in May 2009 and to download the source sheets for the Program.

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