

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friend,

This is the second edition of "Links" in an electronic form. We have received very favorable comments thus far on this method of getting ICJW's message out to a broader audience. Please email it on to whomever you think it might be of interest. It is also provided in pdf format on the ICJW website, so that it can be printed off and distributed on paper.

There has been some question as to the meaning of "Ezine", which simply means 'electronic magazine,' which is what "Links" has now become. I also wanted to acknowledge the wonderful work of the former editor of "Links," Addriane Sherman, during the previous administration in producing the publication.

I have just returned from New York from the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. As usual, the sessions coincided with Purim this year, as well as leading up to International Women's Day (March 8). During the week, we also marked the Fast of Esther, chosen as a day to raise awareness of the plight of *agunot* and *mesuravot get*. I would like to suggest that these events all share a common element of the struggle against tyranny, and all center on the place of women in combating that tyranny.

The Purim story, with Esther as its heroine, should encourage us that it *is* within the power of women to combat tyranny of all kinds and to change the fate of others. Let us hold on to that message as we proceed in our work and continue to struggle against tyranny in every form.

Sincerely,
Leah Aharonov
President, ICJW



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ISSUE BRIEFS

- **51st UN Commission on the Status of Women**

ICJW representatives of ICJW were among the thousands of women from governmental delegations and non-governmental organisations worldwide who convened in New York from 26 February to 9 March 2007 for the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women. The main theme this year was "The Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child".

The women came together to discuss the issues confronting their communities, and to produce resolutions as to how they can be improved - resolutions which are taken seriously by the United Nations. Topping the agenda were the lack of educational opportunities for girls in many countries, problems associated with HIV/ Aids, trafficking, and ongoing discrimination and

violence against girls and women, especially with regard to their impact on the girl child. Teenage girls from around the world came to New York to share their experiences and speak out at the United Nations.

The ICJW UN team was very involved in helping to raise consciousness on a range of important topics. We presented a Statement on the damaging effects of the media on the girl child's self image for which credit is due to **Doris Leifer** and **Madeleine Brecher**, who drafted the Statement and, together with **Roberta Ross** and **Phyllis Gottdiener**, enlisted 12 other NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC to endorse and sign it. These include: Anglican Consultative Council; Armenian International Women's Association; Associated Country Women of the World; Gray Panthers; Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America; International Federation for Home Economics; International Federation on Ageing; International Health Awareness Network; International Immigrants Foundation; International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation; Perhaps...Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference; Soroptimist International; Women's American ORT/World ORT.

ICJW supported two NGO-sponsored side events, which were organized by the National Alliance of Women's Organizations, on "Media Exploitation of Girls as a Form of Violence Against Girls", and "The Role of Faith-based Groups in Stopping Trafficking of Girls: the contact between NAWO and ICJW was facilitated by past ICJW President June Jacobs. Another session, "The Role of Men and Boys in Ending Discrimination Against Girls," was sponsored by ICJW and Zonta, coordinated by Roberta Ross.

The ICJW Reception, organized by Phyllis Gottdiener, was kindly hosted on the premises of the NCJW US New York Section. We welcomed representatives of many delegations from Jewish and non-Jewish women's organizations from around the world, members of the Israeli delegation to the CSW and of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, and representatives from the World Jewish Congress, among others.

- **First Women Finally Elected to Strasbourg Consistoire**

ICJW is proud and happy to congratulate **Janine Elkouby** and **Michele Jablon** on their election to the Consistoire of Bas-Rhin in Strasbourg, France. They are the first women in history to be elected to this regional Jewish organization, and this was made possible only after a long struggle to allow women to stand as candidates.

Mrs Elkouby was elected in the first round by 58% of the votes, and Mrs Jablon in the second round in third place. Janine Elkouby, speaking after the double election, said: "The Consistoire has finally demonstrated the will of the community to have a change of policy and personnel, and to become a modern organization, where women will now be able to introduce new ideas and new ways of thinking. Let's hope that we will be able to do fruitful work for the benefit of the whole community."

Mrs Elkouby, who is President of ICJW's French affiliate, Groupe de Liaison Juif Féminin (GLIF), also expressed her thanks to the ICJW for their help and support during this difficult year, during which the women of Strasbourg have fought for female representation. "It was difficult but necessary and the victory was possible because of all the people, all the organisations and all the media, Jewish and non-Jewish, who supported us in our struggle for representation."



- **Agunot Update**

Sharon Shenhav spent much of February in New York, representing and lobbying on behalf of *agunot*. She spoke at the JOFA Conference, and her speech was widely reported in the U.S. Jewish press. Sharon also met with a number of senior rabbinic figures who are concerned about the plight of *agunot*, and who may try to reschedule the cancelled international rabbinic conference to discuss what can be done to help them. For an update, visit <http://www.icjw.org/ijwrp>

- **Welcoming Israel's New Presidents**

We are delighted that **Michal Modai** has now formally taken up her post as Israel Vice President of ICJW, having relinquished her position as Chairperson of the Israeli affiliate of ICJW, the Council of Women's Organizations, at the end of 2006. We also congratulate **Talia Livne**, who took over her role as Chairperson of the CWOI. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that Israel currently has a (temporary) female President. In place of Moshe Katzav, the acting President of Israel is **Dalia Itzik**, who is also Speaker of the Knesset. Mazal tov to all of them!

ACTION ALERTS

- **NCJW backs Campaign against Segregation on Israeli Buses**
ICJW's US affiliate, the National Council of Jewish Women, is supporting the Israel Religious Action Center's legal challenge to segregation of men and women on Egged buses in Israel. To read the article by NCJW President **Phyllis Snyder**, visit <http://www.jta.org/snyder>
To join the campaign, visit http://action.ncjw.org/campaign/israel_bus
- **Campaigning Against Beauty Stereotypes**
The ICJW Statement to the UN Commission on the Status of Women urges the UN's Economic and Social Council to work to change the depiction of women and female beauty in international media and advertisements. It condemns media, advertisements, and popular culture worldwide for promising perfect beauty and promoting stereotypes which can create anxiety, lack of self-esteem and loss of confidence, and impede development of a healthy self-image."

These images and standards of beauty contradict good health practices and contribute to negative feelings about physical appearance. The still-malleable girl-child is defining herself and her self-worth by false standards. Girls should be celebrated for who they are and not how they look. The next generation of girl-children must grow up without the pressure and consequences of having to live up to unrealistic beauty ideals."

Just as the struggle for women's rights began with massive consciousness-raising, the issue of self-image must also become a topic of public debate. Let us help the girl-child stop chasing a mirage and get back to reality. ICJW affiliates and supporters are urged to join this campaign and help to raise awareness of this issue in their communities.

COMMUNITY SERVICES REPORT

In this issue of Links, we look at two successful projects from NCJW-USA Sections which have been nominated for the 2006 Faith in the Future Award, and a range of exemplary community service projects from South Africa.

- The **Young Women's Group (YWG) of Essex County Section** ran their first Spring Mitzvah Night "Clothing Connection", at which they assembled more than 450 mini-layettes and mini-wardrobes filled with clothes and accessories for needy babies and children. This project marked the launch of the NCJW Young Women's Group Clothing Connection to benefit babies and children of the community.

The YWG solicited donations of new items from various local and national businesses, conducted clothing drives for used items, and their Creative Hands knitting group made beautiful booties, hats and blankets. These clothes were donated to needy babies and children in the community through nine area hospitals and social service agencies. Some went to children from underprivileged families, and some to the babies of drug-addicted mothers, who are left at the hospital until a home is found for them. Some clothing was donated for children with cancer and blood disorders who attend a free summer camp and often arrive without adequate clothing.

More than 75 women participated in this program to help other babies and children much less fortunate than their own. Non-members were introduced to the caring women who exemplify NCJW, and several became members following the event.

- **NCJW-USA Orange County Affinity Group** arranged performances of a one-woman play entitled "Jonna's Body, Please Hold". This was a poignant and humorous production about how Jonna, who wrote and starred in the show, dealt with three different bouts of cancer, starting at age 19. Jonna is a professionally trained clown so she brought humor, enthusiasm and an uplifting attitude to describe very serious life situations that traditionally are met with grief, loneliness and confusion. After the show, Jonna held a question and answer session for audience members to discuss Jonna's experiences and their own.

350 people attended the performance but the ripple effect means that hundreds more were impacted by this project. Its impact was to demystify a typically frightening subject, promote awareness, health, knowledge and acceptance. The theater lobby was filled with materials from local sponsors involved in

women's healthcare, and promotional materials such as first aid kits were given out.

The project was a successful fundraiser, attracted new members and increased visibility of the NCJW in the area. This Affinity Group now has more members working on their current project and greater community involvement.

- **Community Service News from South Africa**

The following is a round-up of Community Service projects from five of the eleven branches of South Africa's Union of Jewish Women. The UJW's policy is to render service to both the Jewish and broader community, irrespective of race, colour or creed, and to Israel.

UJW PRETORIA BRANCH provides food and other resources to the Luvuyo Orphanage in Soshanguve, and recently arranged for residents of the Jaffa Senior Citizens Home, where UJW women also help out, to make teddy bears to give to the orphans.

UJW CAPE TOWN BRANCH volunteers help to run the Kensington Crèche, a pre-primary school for underprivileged children of working mothers in the Kensington/Maitland area of Cape Town, caring for 85 children.

UJW JOHANNESBURG BRANCH delivers kosher meals to 120 people who are elderly, lonely, often house-bound and near destitute, for whom the twice weekly visits of UJW volunteers are the highlights of their week. UJW also runs crisis projects to help the victims of the ever-increasing HIV/AIDS pandemic, such as providing food to granny and child-headed households, providing clothing to hospital crisis centres, crèches and nurseries, and supporting the Community Action group which runs the Thembalethu HIV/AIDS Wellness Centre in Alexandra township.

UJW DURBAN BRANCH regularly delivers monthly food parcels to 20 child-headed families and runs a successful reading program at their school.

UJW OUDTSHOORN BRANCH runs a twice-yearly clothing and shoe drive to provide parcels which are distributed to local welfare organisations for needy recipients. They collect used stamps for charity, magazines for the local hospital and retirement home, and recyclable materials for the Eljada School for the Disabled.

I found all these projects most inspirational, and look forward to providing information on more ICJW affiliates' work in community services. Please send me information from your affiliate!

Robyn Lenn OAM
ICJW Community Services Coordinator

AFFILIATE ACTIVITIES

- **French Colloquium on Violence Against Women**

Coopération Féminine, ICJW's French affiliate, together with WIZO France and a number of other organizations which work with women, organised a colloquium for 350 people, on the subject of Violence Against Women in the Jewish Community.

- **UK Human Rights Seminar on Faith Schools**

The recent Human Rights Day Seminar of the League of Jewish Women in the UK concentrated on the topical question of faith schools, and in particular, whether they should continue to receive state funding – an issue which has been widely discussed in Britain recently. The panel of speakers comprised two Rabbis, two Islamic representatives, a Catholic representative of the Commission for Racial Equality, and a non-conformist Protestant. Widely different views were expressed about the advantages and disadvantages of faith schooling, and everyone was encouraged to think through, and perhaps re-think, some of their views on the subject. **Judy Lever** and the ICJW Committee of the League of Jewish Women organised this event, and it was dedicated to the memory of the late **Valerie Hyams**, a much missed Past President of the League, and Life Member of ICJW Executive.

- **Georgian Affiliate Trains Multi-cultural Youth Workers**

Lea, the Jewish Women's Organization of Georgia, FSU, has run a successful pilot project for the training of Jewish and other ethnic minority girls for multi-cultural youth work and conflict resolution. This is an important issue in communities where ethnic rivalries have surfaced in recent years. The

course was structured as a mutual learning situation where participants joined the experts in designing the project. It teaches them both theoretical and practical frameworks for conflict resolution, with examples drawn from other European and international situations, and opportunities for intercultural dialogue between the participants.

To date, the Lea project has trained 96 participants from Jewish, Armenian, Russian, Belarusian, Ossetinian, and Georgian backgrounds. Its success has been demonstrated by the increasing number of applicants from all over Georgia, and it has raised Lea's profile with the local community and government. The project was set up by Lea's interfaith & interculture representative, **Manana Palagashvili**, and its President **Marine Solomonishvili**.

- **Australian Honors**

We congratulate **Zina and Paul Conway** who received one of Australia's highest honors – the Order of Australia Medal - in the January 2007 Australia Day Honors list. Zina Conway OAM and Paul Conway OAM are a wonderful husband and wife team, living in Sydney and active in the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia. Zina, as well as holding the NCJWA National Secretary role, has for decades cooked and baked for NCJWA events, including the ICJW Convention in 2002 and hundreds of NCJWA NSW functions. Paul has been NCJWA National Honorary Solicitor for two terms (10 years in all) and NCJWA NSW Honorary Solicitor since 1989. Paul enabled four Sections and the National body to be incorporated within the current National term of office. A function honoring Zina and Paul will be held at Council House on May 6.

ICJW IN THE NEWS

From JTA — The Global News Service of the Jewish People (www.jta.org):

Jewish group lauds girl study

The International Council of Jewish Women commended an American Psychological Association study on images of girls in popular media.

The recent release of "The Sexualization of Girls" precedes a meeting of the U.N. Commission for the Status of Women that will take place Feb. 26 to March 9 in New York.

The commission plans to focus on the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls.

In a statement to the United Nations condemning stereotypes of girls promoted in the media, the Jewish women's council wrote that the study "found evidence that the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising and media is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development."

The study examined television, music videos and lyrics, magazines, movies, video games, the Internet and consumer products geared toward females.

"We applaud the APA for undertaking this study, and we hope that other leading professional organizations will join the call for the protection of young females against media pressure," council president **Leah Aharonov** said.



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For more information and updates, visit www.icjw.org

