



# Newsletter

International Council of Jewish Women: 5655 Silver Creek Valley Road #480, San Jose, CA 95138 U.S.A.  
Website: www.icjw.org Email: president@icjw.org Tel: +1 408 274 8020



### Dear Colleagues:

Since the start of my Presidency, our focus has been assessing what we do and how we do it. We recognize that “Tikun Olam” - the imperative which inspired our founders to establish ICJW nearly 100 years ago - remains the same imperative today. However, we also recognize that the problems and challenges have

grown larger and more complex since 1912, such that we must prioritize our objectives in order to be as effective as possible.

All of our affiliates around the world were asked to submit their recommendations for three program priorities. A Program Priority Task Force carefully reviewed all of their suggestions and submitted a report in which three program priorities were identified, and shared with ICJW’s Executive Committee for approval. The results of this democratic process will direct the work of ICJW in the years ahead.

Our work will focus on three major areas:

- The Advancement of the Status of Women
- Advocacy for Intercultural and Interfaith Relations
- Campaigning to Improve the Environment

Each of these program priorities is vast; under these headings, each of our affiliates will focus their own activities on the issues which are most relevant in their own communities. Some may choose to focus their efforts on Jewish family law; others may prioritize campaigning against violence against women and children, including the horrors of trafficking. Some may choose combating racial intolerance, while others focus on anti-Semitism. Some may choose global environmental concerns, while others may undertake education and awareness campaigns in their own community. Some affiliates may select more than one priority, while others, with smaller membership numbers, may focus all their energies on one. So, while our international Program Priorities have defined the general topics for primary consideration, ICJW continues to offer its affiliates a wide scope of interest for their individual and regional activities.

It is my hope that our affiliates will find among these priorities subjects which will excite and motivate their membership. We do not all need to be doing the same thing. We do, however, all need to be moving in the same direction, embracing the same goals, and respecting the same objectives. I also hope that, at the end of this Quadrennial, we will all review these four years with a communal sense of achievement. We need to know that we have moved toward the original imperative: Tikun Olam. Prioritizing our program is the critical first step.

We hope that all our members around the world will enjoy a sense of renewed purpose as we approach the festival of Passover,

With best wishes,  
**Sharon Gustafson**  
President, ICJW

### CONTENTS

ICJW at the UN	2
<i>Geneva – Paris – Vienna</i>	2-3
<i>New York</i>	4
UN Women	5
ICJW Life Members	6
Affiliate Focus: <i>Ukraine</i>	8-9
Affiliate Focus: <i>Panama</i>	10
Women of the Book	11
ICJW Calendar & CSW55	12





# ICJW at the UN:

*ICJW is proud to have consultative status as a non-governmental organization (NGO) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, and maintains permanent delegations in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Paris.*

NGOs represent ‘civil society’ – a term which describes all the voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society, as distinct from governmental or commercial institutions. NGOs can act as a bridge between the national and international structures of the UN, and they often provide committees with reports containing valuable information about the situations on the ground in their areas of expertise.

ECOSOC currently has 3,400 accredited NGOs, and this year a record number of NGOs are applying for status, reflecting the perceived importance of their role. It is therefore particularly prestigious for ICJW to be one of the 2,000 NGOs awarded special consultative status. As such, we are required to report regularly on the work we have undertaken in support of the goals of the Council and the United Nations.

Members of the ICJW delegation to the UN in New York explain: “Our status enables ICJW to sit at the international table and to be heard in discussions on important issues. Many of the issues being discussed at the UN are also ICJW priorities, and we are involved in all of these; campaigning

for the rights for women and girls, women’s empowerment, an end to domestic violence and human trafficking, and health and environment concerns. Our role is both to bring the voice of Jewish women into the committee rooms of the United Nations, and also to report on the discussions which take place there to our membership around the world, through the ICJW website and in reports to our Executive and Affiliates.



*The ECOSOC Chamber at UN Headquarters*

“We are committed to engaging with the issues which impact our world, to reaching out and forming partnerships with other like-minded NGOs, to encouraging appropriate actions among our affiliates and members, and to helping to share the reputation, expertise and passion of both ICJW and the United Nations.

“We do all recognize the enormous scale of the challenges facing the United Nations. In an increasingly interdependent world, there are many difficult issues that are best dealt with through this international body. Let us all hope that ICJW, in some small way, will be able to help move the UN forward in a positive direction in the years ahead.”

## PARIS

Based in Paris, France, UNESCO deals with issues of education, science, and technology. NGOs involved in UNESCO’s Joint Programmatic Commissions (JPCs), sharing their experience of working at grassroots level on these issues around the world. ICJW’s representatives in Paris are Norma Anav, Danielle Obadia, Gabrielle Voignac, and Iana Zbar.

ICJW is vice-chair of the JPC on **Human Rights**, which fights all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and related intolerance through education and implementation of the Universal Declaration. In the lead-up to the Durban II anti-racism conference, ICJW chaired an ad-hoc group which led an appeal to world governments asking that “All formal and non-formal educational programs integrate Human Rights issues”.

ICJW is also vice-chair and rapporteur of the JPC on **Interfaith**, inviting guest speakers, producing brochures and organizing round-table discussions in Paris. Our representatives participate in discussions on human cloning and international governance at meetings of the **International Bioethics Committee**. They helped to issue a statement on the regulation of carbon emissions and the reduction of greenhouse gases before the **Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change**, and they monitor UNESCO projects on water issues.

In October 2010, UNESCO decided to define five holy sites in Israel’s West Bank, which are sacred to both Jews and Muslims, as Palestinian sites, which caused consternation in the Jewish world. During 2011, ICJW’s representatives will participate in meetings to discuss these resolutions and debates concerning the admission of Palestine to UNESCO. They will also attend meetings on Women, Africa and Human Development, events to mark International Water Day, and sessions on the social impact of international migration.



# Engaging with the Issues

## GENEVA

Léonie de Picciotto and Mary Liling represent ICJW at the **Human Rights Council** and other UN bodies that are based in Geneva or meet there regularly.

“With limited human resources – something we share with many other NGOs – we choose to focus on issues that concern us directly and where we feel our presence can make a difference. The challenge is to be present both at the ongoing official UN meetings and to participate and network with other NGOs. Fortunately we can build on contacts and experience developed over the years: ICJW women have been members and officers of a number of NGO Committees, such as **Human Rights, Status of Women, Freedom of Religion and Belief**, to name just a few.

“In the present climate, we feel it is more important than ever to make the voice of Jewish women heard. That is the reason we joined a new NGO task-force on promoting **Gender Equality** in the face of discriminatory cultural and traditional practices towards women; at stake are the universality of human rights that are being threatened in the name of religious and cultural differences.



“NGOs in Geneva may attend all open public sessions and submit written and/or oral statements, which they try to coordinate/co-sign with other like-minded NGOs, on subjects such as violence against women and education for peace, as they come up under the various items on the agenda. We also participate in discussions with Special Rapporteurs and attend the Universal Periodic Reviews, where countries’ human rights records are reviewed by their peers. In theory this is an excellent tool for criticism, but in practice nobody will blame a powerful or allied state.

“Our main job is attending sessions of the **Human Rights Council**, which only singles out Israel. Recently we also attended the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, where Israel was being reviewed. Rather than addressing any of the issues concerning Israeli women, the ‘experts’ focused essentially on the plight of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation.”

## VIENNA

Gerda Frey sits on three active NGO committees based in the UN’s Vienna headquarters: The Vienna **NGO Committee on Women**, comprising 40 international organizations, makes particular efforts to reach out to and involve women from Central and Eastern Europe. Their purpose is to liaise with and disseminate information from the UN’s **CSW** and **CEDAW** committees.

ICJW is one of 43 organizations represented on the **NGO Committee on the Family**, which was founded in 1985 as a platform for the exchange of information on family issues, and to coordinate relevant NGO activities. One of their main events in 2010 was a seminar on “Global Mothers and the Care-Giving Vacuum”, focusing on the experiences of trans-national or migrant mothers - women who leave their families behind and travel overseas to support them by working as caregivers.

The **NGO Committee on Ageing** in Vienna is the European counterpart of the New York committee, and marked the International Day of Older Persons in 2010 with a discussion on the implications for older persons of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals.



# ICJW at the UN

## NEW YORK

The ICJW team of UN Representatives in New York comprises Judy Mintz, Madeleine Brecher, Fran Butensky, Joan Lurie Goldberg, and Phyllis Gottdiener. They represent ICJW at many events, including UN Department of Public Information briefings, meetings of committees and the informal Jewish NGO caucus, UN programs, and as a signatory on declarations, advocacy campaigns, and resolutions.

The highlight of the UN calendar for women is the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings

in the UN and worldwide, advances the status of girls, and assists them to develop to their full potential. It focuses on the protection and empowerment of girls, by researching and writing talking points, arranging educational visits to permanent missions and UN agencies, and running advocacy campaigns about the needs and vulnerability of girls. There are Girl Advocates on WGG who voice their own needs and concerns and share their experiences and dreams. Hot topics include girls' education, the prevention of violence and economic exploitation, and the elimination of discrimination and gender stereotyping. ([www.girlsrights.org](http://www.girlsrights.org))

The UN Human Rights Council is one of the UN entities most critical of Israel. Fran Butensky represents ICJW on the parallel entity - the UN NGO Human Rights Committee - which meets at least once a month and has many active sub-committees. ICJW has an important role to play as an outside observer and commentator, since NGOs are encouraged to engage with and make recommendations to the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights.

The ICJW UN representatives regularly attend monthly meetings of the Informal Jewish NGO Caucus (JNGO) and we help to secure guest speakers. These meetings give us an opportunity to network with other Jewish NGOs and share ideas for pro-active campaigning when anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli issues arise at the UN.

Joan Goldberg recently joined the Committee on Sustainable Development, which advocates for Sustainable Development as described in the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We also participate in a working group promoting gender equality in participation in science and technology.

The mission statement for the NGO Committee on Ageing includes working to raise world awareness of the opportunities and challenges presented by the ageing global population. It publishes an international report, advocates the integration of ageing into UN policies and programs, and encourages member states to include ageing needs in their social and economic policy considerations. ICJW has been represented on the UN Committee on Ageing for over 25 years and on its Executive Committee since 1996; today our representative is Phyllis Gottdiener.



*(l-r) Madeleine Brecher, H.E. Sylvie Lucas, President of ECOSOC, Joan Lurie Goldberg and Fran Butensky at the 2009 Women Ambassadors Luncheon during CSW54.*

([www.ngocsw.org](http://www.ngocsw.org)) that take place for two weeks in March (see page 12). ICJW is represented on the NGO CSW/NY Executive Committee, which provides a forum for substantive discussion on issues and policies under UN consideration relating to women, and for the exchange of important information. In addition, it initiates exciting studies and programs which impact women at grassroots level around the globe. Every year, ICJW is an organizational sponsor of the NGO CSW/NY UN Women Ambassadors' Luncheon, to honor the accomplishments of these female role models.

ICJW is represented on the Working Group on Girls (WGG) of the NGO Committee of UNICEF by Judy Mintz, who also serves as Administrative Coordinator for our New York NGO Team. The WGG promotes the rights of girls



# The Birth of UN Women



Back in 2006, women's organizations including ICJW recognized the need for the UN to set up a central office to coordinate all its activities which affect women. They set up the GEAR Campaign as a network of over 300 women's organizations, human rights and social justice groups around the world, to lobby UN member states and the UN Secretariat to create a coordinated UN agency to advance gender equality. They argued that gender equality is a crucial component of development, human rights, humanitarian concerns, peace and security.

The United Nations General Assembly resolution establishing UN Women was formally adopted on July 10, 2010. Its Executive Board consists of 41 members: the 4 member states which are the highest donors will get 4 seats, 2 from the developed world and 2 from the developing world. The initial funding is set at \$500 million dollars for 2011, but this is unlikely to be sufficient.

On September 14, 2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of Ms. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, as Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women. Women's groups cheered the appointment as Ms. Bachelet brings to this critical position a history of dynamic global leadership, highly honed political skills and uncommon ability to create consensus and focus among UN agencies and many partners in the public and private sectors. USG Bachelet is now at the table of power so women will have a higher level of authority for decision-making and coordination.

Until now, there have been four separate entities at the UN dedicated to women's issues: the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and the office of the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).

The first task facing UN Women will be to consolidate the four existing UN bodies on women to increase operational capacity at country level and, hopefully, gain increased funding for work on women's empowerment and advancement globally. By bringing them together and coordinating their work, the new entity should be better able to accomplish gender mainstreaming throughout the UN system and deliver their obligations and commitments to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and women's human rights more effectively.

UN Women functions will be to support member states through programming, advocacy in behalf of women, implementing resolutions 1325 on women, peace and security and Resolution 1820 to end sexual violence in conflict situations, develop new research on women, and monitor the gender balance of UN staffing. To date, methodical research on women has been unavailable due to the lack of funding and coherence.

Madeleine Brecher, ICJW's representative on the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, says: "It is acknowledged that civil society organizations were responsible for the strong advocacy that created UN Women; yet when NGOs asked for a seat on the Executive Board, we were denied it."

"We have high hopes for UN Women despite its many challenges, the foremost of which is implementation. This entity is being asked to greatly increase its workload with no increase in funding. UN Women needs civil society to think strategically and to help access more money for the entity; ultimately, the success of UN Women depends most of all upon funding."

"Women globally do not feel positive about the UN. Civil society must translate what is happening in New York to local areas around the world. It is crucial that organizations like ICJW get the message to women everywhere and, together with other organizations, hold the UN accountable for advancing women through programming. ICJW must also remain involved with GEAR and monitor how this new entity implements the promises it has made. As one of the birthing partners of this "baby", we must ensure that civil society participation is formalized and that we are consulted about the program and future of UN Women as it grows up."

*continued on page 7*



# ICJW Life Members

*Becoming a Life Member of ICJW is a prestigious honor as only 15 women can hold this title at any time. It recognizes an extended period of leadership in the organization; to be eligible you must have served as an officer or Chair, and on the Executive Committee for a minimum of 12 years. Elections take place at the Executive meeting before the Quadrennial Convention. These three Life Members were elected in May 2010.*

## Eliane Sperling Lewin

Eliane Sperling was President of the ICJW Belgian affiliate for 12 years, served as Vice President for Belgium and on several committees. She was born as Eliane Lewin in Belgium and fled with her family on May 15, 1940, into Vichy France. In 1942 they fled through Spain and Portugal and finally arrived in Canada.



Eliane studied Engineering at McGill University, where she was teased as "the baby engineer". "I can measure how far women have travelled along the path to equality by the indifference with which female engineers are greeted today", she says.

Eliane married Yitzhak, who had been sent from Israel to study in Ghent, so they settled in Belgium, where they took over the family business – a metal working plant – and their daughter Nathalie was born. Eliane was always a Zionist activist. She and her husband ran a weekly Hebrew and Bible class and she became a leader of her local Jewish community. She was also active in the Belgian Jewish umbrella organization CCOJ, serving three terms as Vice President.

Eliane attended her first ICJW meeting in London in the 1980s, during the campaign for Soviet Jewry. She was inspired to get involved and became active both in the Council of Jewish Women of Belgium and on ICJW's international committees. "The most interesting work was on the Grants Committee, particularly meeting our new members from former Eastern European states. I also became involved with the European Women's Lobby, which has grown from a small group into a powerful European women's organization. The good fight for gender equality has borne its fruits", says Eliane.

"ICJW has given me much. I have been privileged to meet many wonderful women; to connect with Jewish women from different places; to broaden my horizons. But, above all, to have friends all over the world!"

## Chana Berlowitz

Chana Berlowitz grew up in Los Angeles and recalls her mother always being engaged in "Klal" work. She married Jacques and followed him first to Tel Aviv for three years and then to Zurich, where she established a family.



"It would have seemed strange to me to just stay at home with our four children. I was busy with PTA work in our children's Jewish school, and a member of both Mizrahi Women and WIZO. I worked heart and soul during the 1970s and 1980s for the Campaign for Soviet Jewry, setting up the Swiss Council for Soviet Jewry and organizing educational, medical, and food aid for Refuseniks." Chana travelled to the former Soviet Union herself, and tutored Swiss couples before they visited Refusenik families there.

"We worked closely with the Israeli Foreign Office and other Soviet Jewry organizations throughout the world. Later, in my work for ICJW, I met many of my former colleagues from Europe and America who had also been active in this campaign."

Chana was invited by the late Bea Zucker to become a member of the Administrative Committee of ICJW when Lea Seigel of Geneva became President. She became Vice President for Switzerland and afterwards Co-Chair of the Women in Judaism Committee, head of the Committee for Jewish Education, and then Co-Chair of the Herczeg Seminar in Jerusalem. "It was fascinating work and I came across many highly motivated women who helped me to fulfill our various projects."

"I consider the ICJW an excellent organization serving a highly important position in Jewish Life. Through the coordination it offers to national Jewish women's organizations throughout the world, its functions at the United Nations, as well as its informative role on both Jewish and feminist topics, it serves as a much needed source of knowledge and guidance for us all. It is a great privilege for me to have become a Life Member and I feel bonded to my sisters in ICJW."



## Addrienne Sherman

Addrienne has been enthusiastically active in ICJW since 1972, and she is responsible for encouraging many members of the UK's League of Jewish Women to participate. She served on the organizing committees for the European Conference in London in 1977, the Bournemouth Convention in 1984, and the European Conference in London in 1992, and for over 30 years she has travelled to ICJW's seminars, conferences and conventions around the world, making firm and lasting friendships.

Addrienne held the post of UK Vice President for six years, during which time she organised tour groups linked to ICJW's conventions and seminars, which resulted in the UK having the largest foreign delegation! She also served on the Executive Committee of ICJW as the editor of Links (twice), as Chair of the Environment Committee, and as Chair of the Nominations Committee. She continues to represent us on the European Jewish Council.

Addrienne joined the League of Jewish Women in 1955, has held many local and national positions and is a Life Member of the League Council. She chaired the Jewish Guide Advisory Committee, which is responsible for Jewish Brownies and Guides (girl scouts movement) throughout the UK. She also served on the Religious Consultative Council of the Girl Guides, at meetings chaired by Princess Margaret.

Addrienne has been married to Stuart (who is also an ICJW supporter) for 55 years and has two married sons, four grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Addrienne has always dedicated time to explaining ICJW's procedures and personnel to first-time delegates at ICJW meetings, and nurturing new delegates from affiliates around the world. Her efforts to welcome and include them have made ICJW events more enjoyable for many new members. She has also given generous support to those who preceded and followed her as chair of the League ICJW Committee. All of these people will have been delighted when Addrienne was deservedly elected a Life Member at the 2010 Quadrennial Convention in Cape Town.

*Interviews by Gillian Gold, Nadine Iarchy and Vera Kronenberg.*

*continued from page 5*

Speaking at the First Regular Session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality in January 2011, UN Women's Executive Director Michelle Bachelet listed its five thematic priorities:

- 1) **Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation**, working with partners to close the gaps in women's leadership and participation in different sectors and to demonstrate the benefits of such leadership for society as a whole;
- 2) **Ending violence against women** by enabling states to set up the mechanisms needed to formulate and enforce laws, policies and services that protect women and girls, promote the involvement of men and boys, and prevent violence;
- 3) **Strengthening implementation of the women, peace and security agenda**, through women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes, gender-responsive early-warning, protection from sexual violence and redress for its survivors in accordance with UN resolutions;

UN Photo / Marco Castro



- 4) **Enhancing women's economic empowerment** is particularly important in the context of global economic and environmental crises. UN Women will work with governments and multilateral partners to ensure the full realization of women's economic security and rights, including to productive assets and full social protection;
- 5) **Making gender equality priorities central** to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting: working with partners, UN Women will support national capacities in evidence-based planning, budgeting and statistics.

## Building a Bright Future from a Tragic Past



The population of the Ukraine is around 46 million people and more than 260,000 identify themselves as Jews, with many more still too nervous to do so. Understanding a little of the

geography and history of this Eastern European country explains why.

The Ukraine is a republic in Eastern Europe, bordered in a clockwise direction by Belarus, the Russian Federation, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, the Black Sea, Poland, and Slovakia. Ukrainian Jewish history starts with the beneficent rule of the pro-Semitic Khazars in the 8th century and the flourishing of Jewish communities in the 15th century, and then deteriorates through the impact of the Chmielnicki Massacres of 1648, Russian pogroms in the 19th century, the murderous Ukrainian civil war of 1917, and decades of Soviet oppression. During World War II, many Ukrainians collaborated with the Nazis in the extermination of 1.2 million Jews in occupied Ukraine.

After the Shoah, those Jews who returned found

institutionalized anti-Semitism and political propaganda, and only a few synagogues were allowed to remain open, under the scrutiny of Soviet secret police. The Ukrainian nationalist movement started during the 1960s to raise awareness of the atrocities that Jews had experienced during the Holocaust, which was absent from Soviet history books.

When Ukraine declared independence on August 1991, the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement expressed a positive attitude toward the Jewish population, and President Leonid Kravchuk commemorated the 50th anniversary of the mass murder of Kiev's Jews at Babi Yar, acknowledging the Ukrainian people's share of guilt for such atrocities. The state now recognizes Jewish cultural and religious institutions, including 24 schools and 10 Yeshivot, and 40 synagogues. The Ukrainian government also returned 20 synagogues and 700 Torah scrolls to the community.

The Ukrainian capital, Kiev, is today home to an estimated 50,000 Jews, and there are also large and

thriving communities in the cities of Odessa, Kharkiv, Dnepropetrovsk and Zhytomyr. Interesting cultural sites in the Ukraine include the birthplaces of Sholem Aleichem and Golda Meir in Kiev; the childhood home of Haim Nahman Bialik in Zhytomyr, Buchach where S.Y. Agnon grew up, and Berdychiv, once an important center of Hasidism.

Although Jews have advanced in governmental positions, they still face much hatred because of their religion and beliefs. Several political organizations are actively anti-Semitic, and many Ukrainian citizens



*The Synagogue on Shchekavitskaya Street, Podol, Kiev*



# Ukraine

still distrust Ukrainian Jews and believe that they are responsible for the country's economic problems.

The Ukrainian Independent Council of Jewish Women was established in 2009 and already has 17 branches and 2,100 members. Its president, Eleonora Groisman, also runs the newspaper "Jewish Kiev", which prints 10,000 copies, and its website, updating its 4,000 subscribers on a wide range of issues. This enables Eleonora to attend high-profile events, such as the recent meeting between the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and Israeli President Shimon Peres.

The main focus of the Council is helping to rebuild the Ukraine's Jewish community and preserving its historical and cultural heritage. It organizes cultural and educational activities and works to develop initiatives for children and young people. It also campaigns for the civil rights of Ukrainian Jews, and against trafficking and violence towards women and children.

Recently, the Council has been involved in many campaigns against the revival of fascism and the glorification of the Nazis and their accomplices. As a result of its lobbying, a neo-Nazi festival due to be held near Kiev last summer was banned. The Ukrainian Independent Council of Jewish Women took an active part in organizing the conference "Lessons of World War II and the Holocaust" with the international human rights movement "Peace without Nazism", and Eleonora Groisman spoke about working with youth to prevent the revival of fascist ideas.

"I see this as a crucial part of our work", she explains. The Ukrainian people – Jews and non-Jews – have only recently started to come to terms with their history. We work with survivors - the former inmates of concentration camps and ghettos, and their families – and also help to organize national educational events to educate Ukrainian youth about the dangers of fascism. Today, with the rise of the far-Right in many European states, these messages are more important than ever."



# Affiliate Focus: Panama

## Embracing the Panama Sisterhood



ICJW's newest affiliate is the Sisterhood of Kol Shearith Israel in Panama. Founded in 1932, this was the first formal organization led and made up only of women in the Republic of Panama. It was affiliated with the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (today the Women of Reform Judaism).

This group of very determined women was led by Inez B. Fidanque, the first president, whose vision and mission are seen even today in the activities of the group. Most of the women were related to each other and membership has passed from generation to generation.

Their first priority was charity for members of the congregation, for other Jews and non-Jews in the Panamanian community. They organized reading circles, sewing circles, Passover Sedarim, Shabbat dinners and all the Jewish festivals. They raised money for a new synagogue and community center, built in 1935, and taught in the Hebrew school.

With World War II looming and Jewish refugees arriving from Europe, it was up to the Sisterhood to take care of them and make them feel welcome and protected. The Panamanian government issued transit visas, with the proviso that the refugees would not become destitute and require government support. The Kol Shearith board of directors taxed each member of the congregation to raise funds for the refugees. They bought them apartments, clothes, food, and medicine, and tried to organize them into communities.

Organizing transit visas was almost impossible, because no other country would take the refugees. The overwhelming costs forced the congregation to ask for help from the Joint Distribution Committee. When the United States entered the War, they did not want "enemy aliens" near the Panama Canal. Most of the refugees, who were now considered German enemy aliens, were rounded up and shipped to internment camps in the U.S., where most found help from relatives.

The Sisterhood endowed a bed at the Hospital Panamá for use by any refugee who needed medical care. After

the War, they continued this service for any needy person who needed hospitalization, until the hospital closed. The Sisterhood also undertook the funding of the Esther Maduro Scholarship to the College of Nursing at the University of Panama, which has helped seven registered nurses to finish their university studies.

They helped to set up a Jewish Day School, run according to the principles of Progressive Judaism and with the highest standards of education. They remain involved with the management of the Colegio Isaac Rabin, which is accredited by the International Baccalaureate organization



*Mirta Goldflus, Latina American Chair, signing the ICJW affiliation agreement with members of the Sisterhood of Kol Shearith Israel, Panama.*

and fully integrated with Jewish and non-Jewish students.

The Sisterhood supports the Salvation Army School for the Blind, which is named after one of their founding members, Amelie De Castro, a teacher for the blind. They also help the Nutrehogar organization, dedicated to fighting childhood malnutrition, and provide assistance in national emergencies, such as the recent floods that left hundreds homeless in Panama.

The Sisterhood was looking for an international connection in order to link with similar Jewish women's organizations around the world, when ICJW Latin American Chair Mirta Goldflus visited from Uruguay and invited them to join ICJW. ICJW's November 2011 Executive Board Meeting will take place in Panama City, where we look forward to meeting our newest affiliate.



# Women Illustrate The Book

Photo: Rebekah Raleigh



*Shoshana Gugenheim writing a Sefer Torah*

Shoshana devised the Women of the Book project as both a channel for artists well-versed in Torah to express their artistic vision and as a gateway for those who have not yet found their voices working within the narrative of the Jewish people. She explains: “Our goal is to support the emergence of Jewish women artists as intimately connected to text, as storytellers, and as visionaries, who inform our lives as women, as Jews and as citizens of the world.”

This collaborative, international project will result in a traveling exhibit of the midrashic scroll, for display in museums and galleries around the world. Women of the Book will also produce an art book featuring the work of the artists alongside ancient and contemporary midrashim (commentaries), interviews with the participating artists, and essays by leading Jewish feminist thinkers and curators. An interactive curriculum will provide programming for community education. The project is available to everyone via the internet. Visitors to the [WomenoftheBook.org](http://WomenoftheBook.org) website can see many examples of the creative and dramatic panels that have already been created and can watch the development of the project.

“We aim to include artists from around the world. There are 14 panels which have not yet been adopted, and we invite ICJW members to recommend Jewish women artists who might be interested in contributing,” says Shoshana.

The first Torah scroll to be written by female scribes was completed in October 2010 for a congregation in Seattle, Washington, USA. The creation of this scroll inspired the lead scribe, Shoshana Gugenheim, also an educator and community artist, to launch an exciting international art project called Women of the Book.

As a woman and an artist, Shoshana wanted to see how she and other Jewish women artists would interpret the text in visual imagery, creating an artistic commentary on the Torah. 54 Jewish women artists from around the world are being asked to each create a parchment panel depicting one portion of the Torah. The result will be a visual, midrashic (interpretive) scroll, based on the form and content of a traditional Torah scroll, in which Jewish women record, reflect and revision the Biblical text.



*Parshat Beshalach by Mirta Kupferminc from Argentina*

Find out more at [www.womenofthebook.org](http://www.womenofthebook.org)

## ICJW Calendar 2011-2012

May 16-17, 2011	ICJW Executive Board Meeting, London
May 29-Jun 1	NCJW-Australia National Convention, Melbourne, Australia
September 3-5	UN DPI/NGO Conference, Bonn, Germany
November 14-15	ICJW Executive Board Meeting, Panama City
Early March, 2012	UN Commission on the Status of Women
March 7, 2012	International Agunot Day (Fast of Esther)
March 8, 2012	International Women's Day
April 29 – May 1	ICJW European Regional Conference, Berlin, Germany
May 2-3, 2012	ICJW Executive Board Meeting, Berlin, Germany

### 55th UN Commission on the Status of Women



By the time you read this, the 55th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women will have taken place in New York, with ICJW actively involved in three events.

In partnership with ECPAT-USA, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women and the International Federation of University Women, ICJW has sponsored a theatrical presentation by the Project Girl Performance Collective entitled “Girl-Power: Voices Without Borders”. This creative theater piece, written and performed by the girls, was followed by a dialogue between the actors and the audience. The program addressed social, political and cultural issues related to the priority theme of CSW55 - access to education in science and technology - and the review theme - the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

ICJW has also co-sponsored a workshop entitled: “Resilience: A Strategy for Realizing Gender Equality in Higher Education and Technologies”, together with WIZO (the Women’s International Zionist Organization). One of the panelists was Dr. María Angélica Kotliarenco, Executive Director of CEANIM, the Center for Studies of Children and Women. This organization has been working among the poorest families in Chile to ensure that their children get the pre-school education they need, regardless of gender, to succeed in our increasingly technological world.

ICJW was also an organizational sponsor of the NGO CSW / NY UN Women Ambassadors’ Luncheon. Look out for updated information on the website: [www.icjw.org](http://www.icjw.org)

### The International Council of Jewish Women



#### Promoting a Just Society based on Human Rights and Jewish Values

Established in 1912, the International Council of Jewish Women is an umbrella organization representing 38 affiliates on five continents. ICJW gives a voice to Jewish women around the world and a platform for advocacy and action on the issues that concern us.

President: Sharon Gustafson

Communications Committee:

Mirta Goldflus

Susie Ivany

Evelyn Falck

Nadine Iarchy

Clarita Spitz

Joan Lurie Goldberg

Donna Gary

Léonie de Picciotto

Liliane Seidman

Editing & Design:

[www.tikshore.biz](http://www.tikshore.biz)

