Dear Friends,

I feel I must open this issue with a word about the last one. Our last Newsletter was the product of intensive editing work on the part of the late Judi Widetzky, who fell ill the night she completed this task and never recovered. Judi was the chairperson of ICJW’s Interfaith and Intercultural Committee and worked tirelessly to make certain that ICJW’s voice was heard on these important themes. She had planned the Newsletter as a showcase of ICJW’s work and aspirations in these fields—and she succeeded. We are reprinting one of the many letters of condolence that we have received, as it reflects the worldwide impact of that Newsletter and her contribution to our organization over many years.

This issue of the ICJW Newsletter is primarily dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have included memories of our past president Leila Seigel, who has followed the work of the UN Commission on Human Rights (now the Human Rights Council) in Geneva for over 30 years. In her report on “Durban II”, Mary Liling describes how the principles of the Universal Declaration have been perverted by the very body that endorsed it. Rahela Dzidic from Bosnia describes rape as one of the severest violations of human rights, which the world has finally recognized with UN Resolution 1820 being passed earlier this year. The League of Jewish Women in the UK has consistently marked Human Rights Day, and our summary of their activities will no doubt be of interest to many. We have also included a short introduction to the Jewish aspects of human rights by an Argentinean Jewish journalist.

I believe that, when looking at the overall state of contemporary defense of human rights, slightly more than 60 years after the Holocaust, we must cling ever more closely to our Jewish value system. As Paul Johnson has written in A History of the Jews, “To [the Jews] we owe the idea of equality before the law…the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person…the individual conscience and… social responsibility…”

When we celebrate the Jewish New Year, among the “calls for repentance” that symbolize the High Holy Days, there is an injunction to act with compassion towards our fellow humans, “For you were a stranger in the land of Egypt.” Rabbi Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of South Africa, writes in his book Defending the Human Spirit; Jewish Law’s Vision for a Moral Society, that Jews are specially charged to demonstrate extra love toward the stranger, in order, among other things, to counteract his/her feelings of alienation. To cause any type of emotional pain to the vulnerable is considered a serious sin. In fact, prophets who later came to castigate the people of Israel criticized them for ignoring the plight of the vulnerable in society, reminding us that a society is judged by how it treats the defenseless. Rabbi Goldstein explains that: “Defending the human spirit is not only about compassion for the oppressed. It is about Jewish law’s appreciation of the greatness of the human spirit, a greatness which needs space and safety to flourish and reach its full potential.”

In marking the 60th anniversary of the Declaration let us try, through our work on behalf of the oppressed and the vulnerable around the world, to integrate both these Jewish and universal values, in order to strive for the betterment of all. Let us not only pity the unfortunate but help to shape the circumstances in which they might flourish in freedom, reach their full potential, and thus contribute to the enhancement of human life everywhere.

Shana Tova ve Ketivah veChatimah Tova,
Leah Aharonov
President, International Council of Jewish Women
Judy Telman interviews past ICJW President Leila Seigel, whose involvement in human rights’ work spans more than three decades.

Leila Seigel was born and raised in New York. In 1975, she moved to Geneva, where she became ICJW’s representative on what was then the UN Commission on Human Rights, precursor of today’s Human Rights Council.

“December 2008 will mark the 60th Anniversary of the adoption by the UN of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Prior to 1948, several countries had issued comparable declarations, but when the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany became apparent it was felt that the UN Charter did not adequately address specific human rights’ issues. The wife of the U.S. president, Eleanor Roosevelt, was chosen to chair a committee to work on the project and, together with the UN Secretary-General, she enlisted the aid of a Canadian legal scholar, John Peters Humphrey, who became the principal drafter of the Declaration. However, René Cassin of France, Charles Malik of Lebanon, P.C. Chang of China, and Alexei Pavlov of the USSR, to name the principals, were also very much involved in drafting the language, so people could not say that it was a ‘Western’ document. Upon its completion and acceptance, Eleanor Roosevelt called it the ‘International Magna Carta of all mankind’.

“It wasn’t until the infamous 1975 ‘Zionism is Racism’ resolution was passed by the UN General Assembly that I became involved as the representative of ICJW on the UN Commission on Human Rights, even though I was not a part of ICJW at the time,” Leila says. “Knowing that I was interested in politics and international relations, a work colleague asked me to take on that challenge, and I have continued as the ICJW representative ever since. The Council generally meets in Geneva, and I, together with other NGO and ICJW representatives, sit on various committees dealing with women’s rights, children’s rights, and human rights.

“It is very frustrating to be sitting in on the various committees, because when we try to present Israel’s point of view in the discussions we are often over-rulled, ignored, or called ‘out of order’. If we weren’t there, no one would speak out when Israel is maligned. It seems as if the entire human rights’ movement, and much of the UN, has been hijacked by the Arab countries and their friends, leaving the Western nations as the minority. We feel very much alone, but we believe that it is important for us to be there, as an NGO, and to at least try to express another opinion and have our voices heard on some of the issues that are of importance to us as Jewish women.

“I have been fortunate to meet and work with many interesting, influential people in the thirty plus years that I have been sitting on the Council. However, prior to my even thinking about being a representative on the UN Human Rights Council I had the honor of meeting Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew who became an expert on International Law and assembled data about Jewish persecution by the Axis powers and its legal basis. He is the person who coined the word ‘genocide’ and defined its meaning, explaining its aims and how it evolved. I met him in New York, in my mother’s home, and he made a great impression on me. His research resulted in the creation of the United Nations Convention Against Genocide, but today he is barely remembered and seldom credited for his contribution to society, its understanding of what constitutes genocide, and how to deal with such atrocities.

“I have had many memorable experiences as a result of my involvement with ICJW. I attended the 3rd ‘Decade of Women Conference’ held in Nairobi in 1985. There were 1,500 official delegates from 157 countries and 15,000 NGO representatives. The delegates adopted the ‘Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies,’ which provided a blueprint for action until 2000, calling for the promotion and maintenance of peace and the eradication of violence against women. It also contained specific recommendations for gender empowerment in regard to health, education, and employment. In my opinion, the greatest achievement of the Nairobi Conference was that it brought together representatives of 157 nations who were able, despite their differences, to find common ground and unanimously adopt the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies.”
Strategies. The participants at the Nairobi Conference also called for the revocation of the 1975 ‘Zionism is Racism’ resolution, which was formally revoked by the UN General Assembly in December 1991, under pressure from U.S. President George H.W. Bush.

“I then had the honor of being elected President of ICJW and served in that position from 1985 to 1987. During those years I had the opportunity to travel to several different countries, meeting the wonderful, intelligent, active women affiliated with this unique international movement, personally seeing the work that they do in their local communities and the services they provide for women, children, and the elderly. I also met women who have broken through the ‘glass ceiling’ and made their mark in business, in their communities, and in government. We have learned that it is possible to do so, and that the work we do as an international women’s movement has merit, opens doors, and creates opportunities by encouraging women to put their skills to good use.

“I get angry and discouraged with the outcome of the Durban Conference, and I know that Durban II will probably be a repeat of the Israel-bashing that prevailed at Durban I. But I also know that we will be there, and that there are others whose voices carry more weight than ours, who are strengthened by our presence, who will speak up and speak out against intolerance, injustice, and illegitimate accusations.

“I have learned much through the years of working with and on behalf of ICJW. I treasure the friendships and the connections I have made, and I hope to see our organization and the work that it does increase and continue to reach out to women and their families everywhere – to bring about change, and to create a just society that recognizes the rights of every human being, regardless of gender, nationality, religion, or color.”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10, 1948. It consists of 30 articles which outline the view of the General Assembly on the human rights guaranteed to all people. It can be read in full at www.unhchr.ch/udhr in over 335 languages.

Jewish Aspects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Almost 60 years ago, the world set a common standard for human dignity and drew up a code by which the peoples of the world should live. The preamble and thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refer to basic principles of freedom, equality, fraternity, and non-discrimination, as well as the rights of the person in relation to the community, rights of free thought, freedom of conscience, religion, political liberties, and economic, social and cultural rights. These transcend political systems and individual custom, and they were not invented 60 years ago. We find numerous passages in the Bible which reflect the inherent rights of all human beings.

"And G-d created man in His own image; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27) establishes the essential equality of all humanity. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 10:1-7) is certainly a corpus of directives to ensure positive relationships among human beings. "Love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) is the essence of Judaism. Hillel says: "What is bad for you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary."

Six months before the Universal Declaration was signed, the Declaration of the State of Israel stated: "The State of Israel will encourage the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on the precepts of justice, freedom and peace taught by the prophets of Israel; it will maintain full political and social equality for all its citizens without distinction of race, religion and sex; it will guarantee full liberty of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture."

The pain, the experience of persecution, and the violation of the rights of Jews over many centuries have given the Jewish people the courage to protect their rights, and remind us to remain conscious of the right to freedom and human rights of all.

Over the past 60 years, the world has not expanded the circle of human dignity as much as we might have hoped. There are still too many people who are excluded from the basic rights set forth in the Universal Declaration. Often their suffering is not fully seen, heard, and felt.

Rosita Elneacavé is director of La Luz, a community magazine in Argentina.
“World leaders fight terrorism all the time, with summit meetings and sound bites and security initiatives. But they have studiously ignored one of the most common and brutal varieties of terrorism in the world today. This is a kind of terrorism that disproportionately targets children. It involves not W.M.D. but simply AK-47s, machetes and pointed sticks. It is mass rape…”


“Violence and crimes against women and girls continue unabated in every continent, country and culture, although most societies prohibit such violence – the reality is that too often it is covered up or tacitly condoned.”

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Rahela Dzidic, head of ICJW’s affiliate in Bosnia, is Executive Director of Civitas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She wrote the following article to explain the need for UN Security Resolution 1820 and what she hopes it will achieve.

Thousands of women and girls have been victims of sexual violence in conflicts around the world throughout the ages. This violence takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Even UN peacekeepers have been implicated in committing rape. According to the Human Rights Watch: “Combatants and their sympathizers in conflicts, such as those in Sierra Leone, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, and Rwanda, have raped women as a weapon of war with near complete impunity” (www.hrw.org/women).

International criminal law has always encompassed crimes of sexual violence: rape can be a violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1948 Genocide Convention, the 1984 Torture Convention, and a crime against humanity under the Nuremberg Charter. Despite these legal precedents, rape has long been mischaracterized and dismissed by military and political leaders as a private crime - the ignoble act of the occasional soldier. Worse still, it has been accepted precisely because it is so commonplace. Longstanding discriminatory attitudes have viewed crimes against women as incidental or less serious violations, proving once again that lives of women are less important than those of man.

Since 1990, both the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda have brought sexual violence charges.

During the violent fragmentation of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, women and girls suffered extensively as ethnic rivalries tore the country apart. The extent of their suffering has yet to be calculated 16 years after the atrocities began. There were incidents of rape on all sides. The International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague was the first court to investigate and document cases of mass rape committed against Muslim women and girls. Many of them were taken into the rape camps, and held there for weeks, even months. Many of them suffered tortures, multiple rapes, and other severe traumas. A Serbian man, Dragan Zelenović, was the first person who admitted guilt for the mass rape of Bosnian (Muslim) women perpetrated in that town during the war. He admitted involvement in nine rapes and his victims included under-age girls. The verdict was of major legal significance, as it was the first time that sexual assaults have been diligently investigated for the purpose of prosecution.

The first time that rape was found to be an act of genocide, to destroy a group under the rubric of torture and enslavement as a crime against humanity, was in September 1998. The UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found former mayor Jean-Paul Akayesu guilty of nine counts of genocide. It was an historic moment; the first time an international court had punished sexual violence during a war.

Efforts like these show signs of progress in ensuring women’s protection under international law. The ICC is a giant leap forward in advancing the human rights of women around the world. One key lesson learned from the ad hoc tribunals was the need for special counseling and protection for victims of gender violence, a lesson thoroughly incorporated into the ICC. In spite of active campaigns to help victims of past and future atrocities, there are numerous reports that rape is being used as a weapon of war even now in Darfur.
Challenges and the Role of Women’s Organizations

According to Human Rights Watch, there is “complicity, dereliction of duty, and violation of legal obligations” on the side of governments and intergovernmental organizations when it comes to prosecution of perpetrators, and/or providing special protection, counseling and compensation of victims.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in 2000, calls for women’s equal participation in peace and security issues. Yet eight years later, it is evident that much more effort is needed to strengthen mechanisms to prevent, prosecute and remedy violence against women in times of war, and to ensure that their voices are heard in peace-building.

The global struggle for all women’s rights is based on universal human rights and the rule of law. This struggle requires all women’s organizations, as well as all international governmental and non-governmental organizations, to unite in solidarity to put an end to this complicity. In practice, this means taking stronger international action to prevent and punish sexual violence.

The historic Resolution 1820 requires the Security Council to analyze and address the occurrence of sexual violence in all conflict-affected situations on its agenda.

UN Security Council Resolution 1820

On June 19, 2008, a special Open Debate of the UN Security Council took place in New York, with Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State, presiding. After many hours of open debate on the topic of Women and Peace and Security, including the use of sexual violence against women and girls as a tactic of war, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1820.

The UN’s most powerful body has thus recognized that halting sexual violence in conflict zones is critical to the maintenance of global peace and security. The concept paper for the draft resolution under consideration was brought to the Council by the UN Ambassador from the United States, Zalmay Khalilzad. The resolution was co-sponsored by ten Security Council members plus 32 other UN member states. I was in the balcony during the morning discussions and, while I was brought to tears by some of the first-hand reports on violence against women and girls from many of the speakers, I was heartened by the unanimous vote in favor of the Resolution much later in the day. Just two days before, four member states on the Council were opposed to the draft.

With the passage of this resolution, the UN’s ability to respond to the high level of sexual violence in conflict situations should hopefully be improved. The adoption, in 2000, of Security Council Resolution 1325 was historic in that it required member states and the UN system to protect and promote women’s human rights. However, the effective implementation of 1325 has been challenging due to the lack of prevention and protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, and the need to end impunity for these acts of violence.

-Madeleine Brecher, ICJW UN Representative, New York
Much has been written about the Durban Review Conference (referred to as Durban II), and so many things are happening on a daily basis that the UN has opened a website to report on developments leading up to this April 2009 Conference, which will finally be held in Geneva. This comes as a great relief, because it is hoped that, on UN premises in Switzerland, we will not witness the same outburst of violent language, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hatred, or the hijacking of the main objectives of this UN World Conference Against Racism for political reasons, which we witnessed in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, just one week before the events of 9/11.

It has been decided that this time there will be no separate NGO Forum, as in most UN Conferences, although structures are provided for NGOs to express themselves. According to the UN, everything is being set up so that things will not get out of hand. Louise Arbour, the outgoing UN Commissioner for Human Rights, has appointed people to examine what guidelines and good practices are necessary to avoid a repeat of Durban I. Unfortunately, at this point, the Preparatory Committee of the Durban Review Conference is headed by Libya, with the help of Iran and Cuba, among others, which is not very reassuring. Iran has already blocked the accreditation of the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy, while accepting immediately the participation of the Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Campaign.

There are those who play down the importance of the forthcoming UN Review Conference, and there are those who believe that the red lines have already been crossed. Canada is the only government so far that has decided not to attend; the US and Israel are undecided, and European countries are holding their breath.

I attended the “UN Watch International Conference for Jewish Community Leaders and Activists Combating Anti-Semitism” in Geneva on May 27, 2008. UN Watch is a Jewish NGO, founded in 1993, by the late US Ambassador Morris...
Abram, which stands at the forefront of the fight for human rights and against anti-Israel bias within the UN. Most of the leading Jewish organizations (more than 100 representatives from 18 countries) that attended this rich, stimulating and thought-provoking action-oriented conference have adopted a “wait and see” attitude or, to be more precise, a “prepare and see” stance.

Jewish NGOs and community leaders are determined to come prepared for Durban II, after the shock of Durban I. With hindsight we see that this event gave the green light to the globalisation of a new form of anti-Semitism dressed up as “anti-racism,” in which Israel is constantly singled out as the world’s main human rights’ violator. This follows on from the infamous 1975 UN Resolution equating Zionism with Racism, which was recognized until 1991 and now “deleted,” that still echoes in the corridors of the United Nations. We see this from the number of resolutions concerning Israel proposed by the Human Rights Council. During its first year there were 10 resolutions against Israel, and no other country was mentioned. This year there were 9 resolutions against Israel, 1 against North Korea, and 1 against Burma.

Hillel Neuer, the young executive director of UN Watch, who makes regular excellent oral and written statements at the Human Rights Council and who organized the informative Conference about Durban II, is worried about this singling out of Israel. Even the NGO Human Rights Watch, which reports on Israel’s human rights violations, has criticized the “singling out of one government to the exclusion of other comparable offenders.”

Ambassador Alfred Moses, the chairperson of UN Watch, said that Durban was a lost opportunity in the fight against racism and that the self-determination of the Palestinian people had no place in a Conference Against Racism and Intolerance. If the Durban Review Process is to achieve its aims, it should avoid one-sided or selective accusations that polarize the debate and distract attention from the important work to be done in the fight against racism and racial discrimination.

At the conference there were disagreements on many issues, such as proposals to organize an alternative event – a “real Conference against Racism,” which many saw as too costly, difficult and even counter-productive “if only Jewish”. For most Jewish NGOs, the main dilemma is whether to attend or not to attend. The consensus was to wait for the next Preparatory Committee Meeting, scheduled for Yom Kippur (a previous committee meeting took place last Pesach!) and to decide then whether or not to participate.

Meanwhile, a Steering Committee of Jewish Organizations has been set up to act locally – in Geneva and within the UN Human Rights Council – and internationally. It is crucial for Jewish NGOs around the world to stay informed about Durban II and to share information, in order to lobby governments and reach out to other NGOs. If we can explain to them what really happened at the Durban Conference and show them how the real objectives of the Conference were hijacked, we can try to ensure that the deliberations and discussions at Durban II in Geneva result in the reversal of what was done in 2001.

-Mary Liling, ICJW Representative to the Council of Europe
Elise Kapell - Human Rights Campaigner

Elise has been a member of National Council of Jewish Women’s New York Section for so many years that no one actually remembers a board meeting without her! As well as serving on the NY Section Israel Affairs Committee, she became a representative of the International Council of Jewish Women in 1968. She focused her efforts on the issues of an aging worldwide population with her involvement in the Committee on Aging at the United Nations.

Among the many memorable world events she attended representing NCJW and ICJW was the First World Assembly on Aging in Vienna in 1982. There she received permission to introduce Close Harmony, a documentary about senior citizens and students from Brooklyn, New York, who came together for an inter-generational concert. This film subsequently won an Oscar and an Emmy for Best Short Documentary. Twenty years later she attended and contributed to the Second World Assembly on Aging in Madrid.

Elise has always been devoted to both NCJW NY Section and ICJW. She had a way of making things happen through her vast network of friends and colleagues at the UN, including Ambassadors, Heads of State, and NGOs. Whether it was a promise to secure the delegates’ dining room for a celebratory lunch on an important anniversary at the UN, a private tour, or a speaker of great interest and importance, she made it happen.

Her presence is always so dynamic – a force to be reckoned with! Through Elise’s efforts, those of us lucky enough to have worked with her have enjoyed extraordinary experiences. During her active years she set a wonderful example of devotion and diligence. Having dedicated herself to the issue of aging, she now spends most of her well-deserved retirement time in Florida, and we wish her many wonderful years.

-Doris Leifer, ICJW UN Representative, New York

Is Leveling the Playing Field Enough?

For the past several years, I have seized every opportunity to speak—if not preach—about the lopsided presence of Jewish women within Jewish organizational life. While there is an abundance of women at the grassroots level, running hands-on community programs and projects, only a very few can be found in leadership positions, and even fewer are actually influencing overall policy decisions.

I believe that there are two major factors hampering this breakthrough. The first is the lack of external support mechanisms, which reflects the lack of recognition of the contribution that women can make to forming effective policies. The second is the unwillingness of women themselves to take the plunge into what they perceive as the murky waters of the existing leadership swamp.

The recent publication of the book Leveling the Playing Field: Advancing Women in Jewish Organizational Life by Shifra Bronznick, Didi Goldenhar, and Marty Linsky, will undoubtedly give a significant boost to the idea of gender equality within Jewish organizations. The authors provide practical tools to encourage organizations to make the needed changes within the workplace. These include increasing flexibility in working conditions, which can often make the difference between women’s advancement to higher positions and stagnation within the organizational hierarchy. Within organizational frameworks there must be a conscious commitment that it will be of benefit to them to include more women in decision-making positions. There must be an articulated recognition that the fresh and different perspectives that women can bring are worth seeking out.

While this aspect is adequately covered in the book, in my opinion the systematic changes that they call for are not enough. The type of leadership model that presently predominates in Jewish organizational life is not attractive to most women. They cannot be motivated to seek positions that necessitate behavior that is alien to their intuitive styles of leadership. There is much literature on the inclusive, empathetic, team-spirited mode of women’s work and leadership. This is the milieu

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During almost all of the past 60 years, the ICJW Committee of the League of Jewish Women in the UK has marked December 10th – Human Rights Day – with a special event. It has become one of the most important events in the League’s annual calendar. It is a day when we take the opportunity to focus on our role as an organisation with social welfare and social justice as our core values, and on our position as part of an international organisation – ICJW – enabling us to demonstrate our interest and involvement in the concerns of the global community.

With the commitment of both the League of Jewish Women and ICJW to the role of the UN and the Universal Declaration, we clearly have an obligation to present current subjects relating to human rights to our members. For our events we always try to choose issues which are particularly interesting and important to our members, often focussing on the UN’s specially designated Years and Decades, and very often selecting topics of particular relevance to women and children. It is an opportunity to broaden our knowledge, raise our awareness, and also to share our values with some of the other groups and organisations with whom we work closely, such as National Council of Women, Women’s National Commission, and the Women’s Advisory Council of the United Nations Association.

Our memorable Human Rights Day events have included meetings on medical ethics, trafficking in women, the rights of elderly people, immigration and asylum seeking, human rights within the British criminal justice system, and, in response to Resolution 1325, women, peace and security. We viewed and discussed the film Half the Kingdom about Jewish women’s rights, and a UNICEF film about human rights for children, with ICJW past president Leila Seigel and the Executive Director of the National Children’s Bureau. Coincidentally, the day after this event, it was announced that the UK government would ratify the Conventions on the Rights of the Child! At another Human Rights Day meeting, the League was honoured by the presentation of a certificate from the Central British Fund (now World Jewish Relief) in recognition of its outstanding life-saving work for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are proud that our meetings have often been held in prestigious venues and featured the most able and informed speakers, from members of the House of Commons, House of Lords, and foreign delegations to the UK, to experts from the worlds of medicine, education and criminal justice, religious leaders, and leaders of other voluntary organisations and pressure groups.

Within the League we work alongside members of the Social Issues Committee, and there is obviously potential for some overlap of interests. However, with our ICJW connections, we endeavour to offer an international perspective on some of these topics. I would encourage any affiliate which does not already mark Human Rights Day to do so, as so often these occasions are truly inspirational, and would thus galvanise the general work of the organisation and unite us with our overseas colleagues.

-Judith Lever, UK Vice-President, ICJW

BOOK REVIEW (continued)

in which women feel comfortable. We work together, often with no hierarchy, in a cooperative spirit, monitoring the goal rather than dwelling on the ego.

The support of the group is also a key to women’s style of leadership. The “tipping point” requires a critical mass of women in leadership positions, to legitimize the alternative leadership model that women can bring to the organization. It is therefore incumbent upon women to support other women by mentoring them. We must become active role models to other women, and organizations should publicize women’s achievements, reward their successes, and congratulate their accomplishments.

Changes within the organizational systems are important, and the practical methodologies set out in this book can help. However, Jewish organizations must also commit themselves to gender equality and women’s leadership and act on that commitment. I am convinced that this will prove to be a solid investment for the future of Jewish communal life.

-Leah Aharonov, President, ICJW
ICJW held its Latin American Conference in May 2008 in Colombia, to coincide with the 80th anniversary celebrations of the Barranquilla Jewish community.

Barranquilla, the main port city of the Republic of Colombia, located on the Caribbean Sea, is the birthplace of the Jewish communities in Colombia. The overall population is today 1,700,000, of whom 360 are Jews.

The first Jewish settlers arriving in Colombia were “New Christians” who came with the Spanish Conquistadors, fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. During the same period other Jews arrived from Portugal, Brazil, and Dutch Guyana. It seems that these first settlers were able to practice their faith openly until the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the Inquisition reached the Western Hemisphere. Other communities were established in Surinam, Barbados, Curaçao, Jamaica, the Virgin Islands, San Eustaquio, Venezuela, Panama, and other areas of the Caribbean. There was a feeling of mutual responsibility among the members of these communities, and rabbis from larger communities regularly visited smaller islands that had no rabbi in order to conduct religious services.

A second Sephardic immigration took place during the nineteenth century, due to the proximity of Colombia to the historical Jewish center in Curaçao and the old communities of the Antilles, Jamaica, and Haiti. Many mixed marriages took place during this period. All of the descendants of these immigrants living in Barranquilla are today Catholic, and they constitute the elite of the local society, including several mayors, one presidential candidate, lawyers, architects, doctors, army officials, industrialists, and poets. Known local family names with Jewish origins can be found in the ancient Sephardic Cemetery. Descendants of these families who maintained their Jewish heritage can be found living today in Curaçao, New York, and Israel.

Among those who maintained their Jewish identity, many played an important role in the economic and social history of Barranquilla: Juan Bernardo Elbers is widely recognized as a pioneer of the navigation of the Magdalena River and for contributing to Colombia’s independence by building and manning schooners; Ernesto Cortissoz, one of the founders of Colombian aviation for whom Barranquilla’s International Airport is named; Agustín Senior and David De Sola founded the first local bank and the city’s aqueduct. Rabbi Augusto De Sola, known as the Great Rabbi of the City of New York, deserves special mention, as does Jorge Isaacs, author of the famous novel María, who is considered one of the creators of this literary style in South America.

The first German and Polish Jews established themselves in Barranquilla during the nineteenth century. Numerous headstones in the Jewish section of the local Universal Cemetery, with their Hebrew writing and Stars of David, bear witness to the Jewish presence during that period, and the oldest tomb is dated 1858. Although the Jewish community in Barranquilla has very old roots, the majority of its present-day members are descendants of Jews who arrived in Colombia 90 or 100 years ago.

In the early nineteenth century, many Sephardic Jews arrived in Barranquilla in search of new economic opportunities. They came from the Near East, Greece, Turkey, Africa, and Palestine and they helped other immigrants who arrived later on in every possible way. Ashkenazi families arrived from Eastern Europe, mainly from Poland and Romania, and, in order to survive and provide for their families, they borrowed money or took merchandise on consignment, selling it door to door. By the year 1926, there were 15-20 Jewish families living in Barranquilla. They met in different homes to conduct their prayers and religious ceremonies, and later on they gathered to pray at 25 San Blas Street, in what is thought to be the first synagogue in Barranquilla.

Immigrants continued arriving from various European countries all through this period. According to the Jewish
historian Simon Guberek: “The capital city of the Atlantic was the great corridor through which all the immigrants of our communities entered Colombian soil. It was the obligatory point for all who came in search of a better life.”

Little by little, the Jews in Barranquilla prospered, and they moved from Calle de las Vacas – literally “The Street of the Cows” – to the Barrio El Prado, considered the best district of the city at the time. By 1940, the members of the small Jewish community in Barranquilla were divided into three clearly defined groups: Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and German.

The Sephardic Community hired out a house that included a place for worship and living quarters for Mr. Salomon Shema, who was in charge of officiating at religious services. They also erected a social club, Centro Club Unión and later, in January 1946, they built the Shaare Tzedek Synagogue. The Sephardic Community at that time had about 300 members of Palestinian, Egyptian, Turkish, and Syrian origins. The Centro Club Unión closed in 1975, mainly due to the emigration of many of its members to Bogotá and out of the country. The Shaare Tzedek Synagogue is still in use today, and in 1977 a Talmud Torah was added in the adjoining gardens.

The Ashkenazi community’s first president was Mr. Hirsh (1926-1928), and although his wife was not Jewish, she devoted her life to helping new immigrants. The next president, Adolfo Hafterl (1928-1932), dedicated all his efforts to the creation of a Jewish school in 1932, in a small house on 38th Street that housed approximately 50 students. They named the school Colegio La Unión, the Union School.

In order to conduct religious services, the Ashkenazi community rented various houses in different sectors of the city. In 1935 they bought a house that served as a school and a social club. Members of the Sephardic community also joined, and the name Colegio La Unión was changed to Colegio Hebreo Unión, by which it is still known. The Jewish Community Center complex was moved again in 1949 and in 1956, when, through a very large effort, the members of the community were able to buy the land to build a Social Club. This is now known as the Centro Israelita Filantrópico. Next to it is the Colegio Hebreo Unión Hebrew school and the Bet-El Synagogue.

Today, the Hebrew School is a trilingual institution, holding classes in Spanish, Hebrew, and English, with 254 students, 74 of whom are Jewish.

Alfredo Steckerl was president of the school board for many years – a very active and generous man who came to be appreciated and respected in many circles inside and outside the community for his outstanding contribution to Barranquilla society. Carlos Kalusin was also very active in motivating the members of the community to achieving new goals, and, in 1962, he laid the cornerstone of the Bet-El Ashkenazi Synagogue. Women were also very active in this generation. Dr. Liuba Schmulson was the only woman to receive, among many distinctions, the honoris causa degree in medicine from the prestigious local Universidad del Atlántico. Rosita Steckerl, founder of the Federation of Jewish Women, received the Civic Medal for her outstanding dedication to the local asylum, Asilo Granja San José.

Although the first Jewish immigrants dealt mainly in commerce, today the Jews are mostly professionals. Of the German community very few remain and have integrated into the other two main streams. Both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities have cemeteries and burial societies.

The Jewish Community of Barranquilla has traditionally been actively involved in charity and voluntary work. In the 1930s, the Bikur Holim VeEzrá donated a ward to the local children’s hospital. During the same period, the Mutual Relief Society, Sociedad de Socorro Mutuo, fostered by an American Jew Dr. Kupfer, provided free medical attention. In 1938, WIZO started activities in Barranquilla. In 1978, the Federation of Jewish Women established a school – named Colegio Golda Meir – in one of the poorest sections of the city. At first they converted an old asylum into classrooms, but over the years built on additions to the original structure. They continue to support this project until today.

The Federation of Jewish Women, founded by Rosita Steckerl, is known today as Fundación Damas Hebreas de Barranquilla, and is a proud member of ICJW. Presided over by Susie Steckerl de Schmulson, it celebrated its 41st anniversary in January 2008.

Original research for this review by Rajel Mussan. English translation and adaptation by Clarita Spitz.
The International Council of Women (ICW-CIF) wishes to express our deepest condolences on your recent loss of your dear sister Judi Widetzky. We remember Judi with much love and appreciate her contribution to the ICW-CIF in the past as Convenor of the ICW Standing Committee for Migration. We thank her for the many years of involvement in the area of advancing the status of women. We note with much admiration her work in achieving peaceful relationship in these difficult times between Israeli and Palestinian women.

The publication of the special issue of the ICJW newsletter with the theme “Women in Intercultural Dialogue” was a fitting tribute to her work and this special issue was distributed to our members during the Regional Meeting of the European Region of ICW-CIF, which took place in Great Britain this year.

We mourn the passing of a wonderful sister. May her soul rest in peace.

Shalom,
Dr Anamah Tan, President, ICW-CIF

**Launch of ICJW Women’s Research Prize**

ICJW is launching a new Women’s Research Prize for academic research on subjects relating to Jewish women. This will be awarded to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution in original research on a topic that either advances an understanding of the role of Jewish women, or addresses a way to improve the situation of Jewish women and analyzes the effectiveness of those women in the world. The award consists of a certificate of recognition and a $1000 honorarium.

Priority will be given to research that has practical application, offering recommendations for specific programs that could be subsequently implemented. The research should have already been completed or be near completion, and must be original work that has not been submitted to any corporation or non-profit other than an institution of higher learning. Preference will be given towards research conducted as part of a doctoral degree, but theses towards a Master’s degree may be submitted.

Submissions should be made in English, but the research itself may have been written in either English, Hebrew, Spanish or French. Deadline for submissions is March 8, 2009, International Women’s Day. For more information, please email contact@icjw.org.

**ICJW Calendar**

- **November 2-3, 2008** Administrative Meeting in Jerusalem
- **January 25, 2009** North American Conference
- **January 26, 2009** Administrative Meeting in Florida, USA
- **May 17-20, 2009** Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar in Israel
- **May 21, 2009** Executive Meeting in Israel
- **November 2009** Administrative Meeting in Prague, Czech Republic
- **February/March 2010** Administrative Meeting in Israel
- **May 6-12, 2010** Convention & Executive Meetings in Cape Town, South Africa

**North American Regional Conference**

The ICJW North American Regional Conference will take place on January 25, 2009, at Temple Beth Shalom in Miami Beach, Florida. The topic will be: “Migration: The Wandering World.”

**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES FEMMES**

The International Council of Women (ICW-CIF) wishes to express our deepest condolences on your recent loss of your dear sister Judi Widetzky.

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**ICJW Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar for Jewish Education**

_This is the Time and the Place for Jewish Women to Learn Together_

ICJW’s next Herczeg Jerusalem Seminar for Jewish Education will take place on May 17-20, 2009, at the Ramat Rachel Hotel in Jerusalem. The theme will be “Profound Philosophical Concepts in Judaism: Time and Place”. The program will include lectures, workshops, discussions, tours and encounters with top-notch experts on: the development of Jewish creativity over time; the concepts of time and place in the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud and Kabbalah; feminist aspects of Jewish thought; female Jewish leadership; and a uniquely women’s perspective on Jerusalem. Join us for a stimulating learning experience with Jewish women from all over the world. For further information, please email: seminar@icjw.org