Dear Friends

As we celebrate our 100th anniversary, the focus of this Newsletter is voluntarism – arguably the core philosophy of ICJW and its affiliates for the past one hundred years. Voluntarism is defined as the deployment of volunteers to organize programs and tackle issues that are not addressed by government and other institutions. For decades, the women of ICJW have devoted millions of hours of voluntary activity, helping to make the world a better place in the spirit of 'Tikkun Olam'.

However, the world of 2012 is surely no longer the world that our founders knew in 1912. The legions of women who belong to ICJW in countries around the world are in many respects quite different from those who preceded us during the first several decades of our existence. Women’s roles have changed and our lives and communities have changed in countless other ways as well.

In this Newsletter we examine trends in voluntarism both around the world and in our affiliates. We look at the changing demographics, the decrease in the availability of volunteers, and the challenge of attracting volunteers. We see some affiliate organizations adjusting their activities to suit the available pool of volunteers, and others raising funds to pay service providers to take over tasks formerly carried out by volunteers.

We have surveyed our affiliates and their responses compel us to review the future of voluntarism in ICJW. As we enter our second century of community activity, we must consider whether our best efforts should still be providing services in our communities, or whether in some communities we can help to effect greater changes in the world through fundraising and activism.

I urge all of us to remember the injunction to help the strangers among us as well as our own families and friends. ICJW has always looked outwards at the wider world, seeking ways to help other people in the Jewish community and beyond - on the local, the national and the international levels. May we all continue to dedicate ourselves to making the world a better place for everyone.

I wish all our members and their families a Happy Passover, and a Happy 100th Birthday!

Sharon Gustafson,
ICJW President

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Voluntarism is a strong tradition in many cultures, including Jewish communities. 2011 was designated as the European Year of Volunteering, celebrating the enormous impact that volunteers can and do have on the economic life of countries and communities.

Studies in 37 European countries showed that approximately 140 million people engage in volunteer work in a typical year. Volunteers represent 44 percent of the non-profit workforce in those countries and make a €277 billion contribution to the global economy. They also represent the equivalent of 20.8 million full-time equivalent jobs.

Volunteering in America reports that 29.3 percent of women in the United States volunteered in 2010 and that religious institutions are the most popular organizations through which women volunteer.

There is conflicting data as to whether voluntarism is increasing or decreasing, particularly during the worldwide economic recession. In 2008, the US Corporation for National and Community Service reported that one million more people volunteered nationally in 2008 than in 2007, attributing this to the instinct to help others in tough times, combined with recently unemployed workers volunteering to network in order to fill otherwise empty hours productively and to network for new work opportunities.

However, in 2009 a new study by the National Conference on Citizenship showed an opposite trend, which they called "Civic Foreclosure", with 72 percent of respondents reporting that they have cut back on the time they spend engaged in civic participation. 66 percent of Americans said that they felt that other people were responding to the current economic downturn by looking out for themselves, and only 19 percent said that people were helping one another more. This trend is combined with the decrease in funds and charitable giving during the recession, which means that non-profits have needed to rely more heavily on volunteering to accomplish their missions, and with the increasing demand for non-profit services from those affected by economic difficulties.
So why do people volunteer? Altruism plays a major role, of course – the desire to help other people is key. But there are probably other reasons behind an individual's decision to give of their time without payment. They may want to learn new skills and test out career opportunities, or even gain work experience that will qualify them for paid employment. Making new friends is a major driving factor, and many volunteers find themselves developing leadership skills and receiving positive and satisfying feedback that enhances their self-esteem.

However, the factors discouraging volunteering may be stronger. The increased involvement of women in the workforce and the delaying of retirement by both men and women have contributed to a decline in the number of volunteers worldwide. People feel that they have less time, which may or may not be true, and they may not want to commit time that they want to spend with family and friends. As families become more spread-out, and as daughters and daughters-in-law return to work and ask mothers for help with childcare, many older people spend more of their time 'volunteering' within the family framework. Lack of interest in communal life and bad volunteer experiences in the past may also be deterrent factors.

Today there are many different avenues for people to show their altruism. Recycling programs, donating used clothes and writing checks to charities give busy people the same feelings of satisfaction, without investing valuable time. Many people prefer not to attend charity events or sit on planning committees but will happily send a donation instead. Monotonous tasks which require patience and commitment are less popular today than in previous generations.

Young people are often more attracted by adventurous overseas volunteering opportunities than local projects. New grass-roots organizations, like the international Limmud movement, give young people new opportunities to define and develop organizations in their own image, rather than fitting in with existing communal structures. The need for recognition and publicity is driving many volunteer organizations to use Facebook and other social media sites to recruit and publicize their volunteering activities.

It seems clear that older people usually have more time and motivation to volunteer. Research shows that finding meaningful activity by volunteering helps to delay many of the effects of ageing. For those retired from the workplace, volunteering helps to fill the social void. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die."
ICJW's Affiliate Volunteers:

ICJW recently undertook a survey of its affiliates on the subject of volunteering. Many ICJW affiliates provide a dazzling range of community service activities both within and beyond their Jewish communities, as documented by our annual LINKS newsletters. However, many are facing a reduction in the number of volunteers coming forward to staff these activities, and having to adapt accordingly.

The National Council of Jewish Women in Australia has seen a slight drop in volunteer numbers, but new and stimulating projects such as the 'Mum for Mum' support program for new mothers attract volunteers because they are more relevant to younger women. They are finding it hard to find people to take on leadership positions, and some sections either appoint a steering committee or pay office staff or an executive director in place of a volunteer section president. National President Di Hirsh says: "We still see ourselves as largely a service provider, although we are also involved in advocating for women and fundraising for our projects in Israel."

The League of Jewish Women in the UK is finding that young women now work and return to their jobs soon after the birth of their children, while their mothers are now looking after grandchildren or their own parents and are less available for volunteering. Increases in income and leisure means that people go on more vacations than previously. League President Marilyn Brummer explains: "Many of the voluntary activities carried out by our members are now undertaken by local authorities or private companies under contract. We have tried to find new welfare activities more suited to the lifestyles of our members, and keeping in touch with our own older members has become a welfare activity in its own right. We are trying to adapt to the changes. We believe that "empty nesters" and the newly or semi-retired will be a more realistic pool from which to recruit active new members."

ICJW’s Swiss affiliate BSJF has a membership of around 3,000 women but only 40-100 of them are actively involved. "Working women are usually happy to participate in local activities, but it is hard to find younger women to join our central committee, since this means taking time off work to attend committee meetings in other cities", says Claudie Goetschel.

The National Council of Jewish Women of Canada reports that their membership is stable but younger members prefer one-off projects to regular meetings. Here too it is becoming harder to find leaders for regional sections, so the NCJW
has modified its organization structure to share responsibilities between joint presidents, with active members who don’t come to board meetings, and other members who are only involved with one of their Section’s functions.

Marta Gyoriova from the Association Ester in Slovakia reports that it is getting harder to find volunteers from its small membership, so they are trying to raise funds in order to maintain the quality and quantity of its programs by buying in help. Similarly in Colombia, where all the volunteers work and 75% are over 60, the women of the Fundacion Amigos de la Comunidad Golda Meir are looking to hire extra help to keep their community service programs running.

The Union of Jewish Women in Croatia has almost 200 members in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek, but they are seeing a decline in membership through high mortality rates and mobility problems among older women. However, younger women are coming forward to volunteer and are particularly active in the smaller communities, both in cultural activities and in humanitarian projects. They are also helped by the increase in funding from the Claims Conference for social workers to help with care of the elderly.

In Hungary, the Esther’s House Association has grown to a membership of 50 and most of the volunteers are middle-aged or young professionals and academics. Katalin Pecsi-Pollner explains that there is no lack of volunteers, but they lack the financial resources to run the programs they want.

Margot Segal, National President of the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa reports a decline in the number of members and active members. "It is very difficult if not almost impossible to find new volunteers today, so many of our projects have been pruned, and no new projects are taken on unless there are volunteers available to run with them."

Around the world, there is a wind of change affecting women's voluntary organizations, including ICJW's affiliates. As care for the elderly and other needy populations is taken over by the state, and as women's leisure time becomes more precious, women are choosing to involve themselves in those organizations whose activities reflect their interests, and which are willing to evolve to suit their needs.
Affiliate Profile

It has been said that Germany is the only European country with a growing Jewish community. In 1950 there were approximately 15,000 Jews living in Germany and in 2010 it was estimated that the population today stands somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000. Perhaps because most of the Jews in Germany are recent immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), they have enthusiastically embraced Jewish culture and facilitated a renaissance of Jewish life.

ICJW’s German affiliate, the Jewish Women’s Federation (Jüdischer Frauenbund or JFB) was founded in 1904 by Bertha Pappenheim as a religious organisation for Jewish women. She helped to unify Germany’s various Jewish social work groups in Germany into a central council (ZWSF). She advocated strongly against the trafficking of women, shocking the very conservative Jewish community which did not want to acknowledge the problem or their own involvement in it. Bertha worked with Protestant and Catholic women's groups to run the "Bahnhofsmission" to help poor girls arriving from Eastern Europe. She also campaigned for women’s right to vote and to be elected onto the boards of the Jewish community, and she was instrumental in bringing together Jewish women's organizations from around the world to set up what is now the International Council of Jewish Women.

The JFB was dissolved by the Nazis in 1938, but re-established in 1953 by Ruth Galinski, Inge Markus and Lilli Marx. They recognized the need to reach out and care for those who had returned from the concentration camps, broken and desperate. They established a women's group to give these people some support and warmth, and to restore hope to their lives. The women’s group had just 500 members throughout Germany. At the beginning, the JFB concentrated on charitable work, but they also set up a national newspaper that helped them to network and communicate on social, cultural, political issues and education. They started to become involved in communal politics, now as board members, and those in West Germany were able to participate in meetings of ICJW.

After 1990, when the reunited Germany opened its borders to the Jews from the former Soviet Union, the JFB experienced a second renaissance. Hedvah Ben Zeev and Hanna Jacobius were active in establishing new Jewish women groups in Eastern Germany and restarting the newspaper, which had lapsed. Today the JFB has 37 branches which are independent groups of women, most of them originating from the former Soviet Union. They each have a migration story: they left their homes, their professions and their friends, but they have discovered the freedom and the Jewish identity that was denied them for so many decades during the communist era.

Jewish women from JFB affiliates listening to a lecture at the annual national seminar.

The different branches of the JFB around Germany have different priorities, but their common primary purpose remains helping to integrate new immigrants. They run lectures, seminars, educational tours and cultural programs, and some participate in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.
They organize educational programs for children and mothers, run cultural and socialization programs to help women to learn German and find work, and maintain social welfare projects to visit the sick and help isolated elderly people.

Like many other Jewish women in Germany, Sina never learned how to transmit the Jewish tradition to her children. She moved from the FSU fifteen years ago. "It was so difficult in the beginning - I spent the first five years crying. But since I saw the beautiful eyes of my newborn grandson, I have found new purpose in my life. The light of Shabbat candles now illuminates our home every Friday night. I study with my grandson and I am proud that he has the opportunity to go to a Jewish school".

ICJW's 2012 European Regional Conference will take place in Berlin this spring, at the "New Synagogue" Centrum Judaicum – the new Jewish Center in Berlin. Entitled "Breaking Walls – Sustaining Jewish Life in a Changing Europe", it will address the tremendous impact that the political and social upheavals since 1990 have had on contemporary European Jewish life, and analyze the different challenges that have resulted.

Sessions for members of ICJW's European affiliates will explore the challenges of sustaining Jewish life in Europe and the search for a Jewish European identity. Workshops will explore the significance of preserving the memory of the Shoah, and its role in preserving democracy and fighting racism. The keynote speaker will be Beate Klarsfeld, the tireless and courageous fighter for justice, who has been responsible for bringing many Nazi war criminals to trial.

Other topics for discussion will include immigration, integration, the revival of Jewish life and Jewish structures from a gender perspective, and the significance of Jewish education for sustaining Jewish identity and human and civil rights in an increasingly pluralistic society. Participants will have the opportunity to join guided tours of Germany’s capital, and to visit the renowned Jewish Museum in Berlin, where the Gala Dinner will also take place.

The conference will celebrate ICJW's centenary and members of ICJW affiliates from across Europe will gather in Berlin to witness this latest German Jewish renaissance, and to find inspiration for the challenges that they face in their own communities.
It is well known that women have suffered from inequality at the hands of male religious leaders in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism since the founding of these faiths. While there has been a revolution in women’s rights in the secular world, with previously existing barriers falling in almost every area of civil society, religious groups have been slow to adopt concepts and programs which provide equal opportunities for women. In some cases, extremist interpretations of various religious laws and practices have caused pain and suffering for women. This article will provide a brief description of some of the areas where the problem of religious discrimination against women exists today.

**HEALTH, ABORTION, AIDS AND FAMILY PLANNING**

The Catholic Church forbids abortion and the use of contraception, even in cases where a woman’s health is at risk due to Aids or pregnancy. In many Catholic countries, particularly in South America, Ireland, and other European countries where abortions are illegal, women risk their lives by obtaining non-professional abortions. Contraception information and products are unavailable. In some countries with a substantial Catholic community and/or other Christian evangelical groups, such as the US, abortion is a major political issue with funding for family planning controversial. Legislation banning abortion or limiting it to extreme cases only, such as rape and incest, is regularly proposed by pro-life advocates. Clinics providing family planning and abortion services are attacked by extremist Christian groups, and physicians performing abortions have been murdered. In contrast, Israel has one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world. Unlike Catholic or Canon Law, where the fetus has equal rights with the mother, Jewish law does not recognize the fetus as having rights until the moment of birth. Prior to birth, the life of the mother will take precedence over the fetus. Similarly, although Jewish Law discourages abortion or the use of contraception, an exception is always made when the mother’s physical or mental health is at risk.

**MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE**

The Catholic Church does not allow divorce. Muslim men are permitted four wives and can marry girl children as well as arranging short term "temporary marriages" for hours or days. They can divorce their wives by a verbal statement before male witnesses. Muslim women lose custody of children over the age of 6 after divorce. Jewish divorce requires consent of both husband and wife, with some husbands withholding consent in order to blackmail their wives for exorbitant financial benefits or refusing to support the children. Jewish women who are denied a religious divorce (Get) are unable to remarry and become Agunot.

**FEMALE CIRCUMCISION**

Female circumcision is common in many Muslim countries, particularly in Africa. The procedure is usually performed by community religious leaders, most of whom are women. The medical complications resulting from this practice are well-documented, with women suffering both physically and emotionally, from the traumatic experience for their entire lives.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

While domestic violence occurs in every country, some religious groups sanction the use of violence against women as a form of "education". Until the mid-19th century, Christian England permitted a man to beat his wife with a stick, so long as it was no thicker than his thumb (Rule of
Thumb). In the late 20th century, most Western countries introduced legislation banning domestic violence, but enforcement has been limited. Muslim communities still sanction the protection of family honor as a defense to the murder of female family members for immodest dress or behavior. In India, "dowry deaths" are common, with Hindu husbands murdering their wives in order to remarry and obtain another dowry. Sati, the burning alive of widows by extremist Hindus, while illegal, is still practiced in parts of India.

RAPE

Under Islamic law, rape is prosecuted only if there are four male Muslim witnesses to the act. In Pakistan, women who file complaints of rape are charged with violation of the law against sexual relations outside of marriage and sentenced to prison, since it is impossible to produce the male witnesses. Since consent to sexual relations is presumed when a woman marries in Christian and Muslim countries, rape charges cannot be filed against a husband. Marital rape is recognized in Jewish law as women have a right to sexual satisfaction, and a number of husbands have been prosecuted in Israel for forcing their wives to have sexual relations without consent.

MODESTY

Modesty in behavior and dress has always been a central part of all religious faiths. Women have traditionally been required to wear clothing that covers the body, hair and face in many Muslim countries, with extremist groups requiring more stringent rules. In Saudi Arabia, women are not permitted to drive or appear in public unless accompanied by a male family member. Many Orthodox Jewish women customarily cover their hair, collar bones, elbows and knees. Lately, extremist groups in Israel have made more stringent demands regarding modest dress that target very young girls as well as non-Orthodox women in public areas. Some male extremists now demand gender segregation on public buses, recently denied a female medical expert the opportunity to accept an award in a public ceremony, refuse to attend public events where women are singing, and have vandalized billboard advertisements in which women’s faces or bodies appear.

COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

Traditionally, religious institutions and communal organizations have been dominated by men. Women are not able to become Catholic priests, Buddhist priests, Muslim imams or Orthodox Jewish rabbis. In the last 40 years there have been changes in the more liberal Protestant and Jewish streams and women now serve as rabbis and priests. However, religious communal organizations in all faiths continue to be male dominated, and when women are appointed or elected, their salaries are lower than those of men.

Sharon Shenhav is a lawyer in Israel and Director of ICJW’s International Jewish Women’s Rights Project.
Nadine Iarchy and Di Hirsh, Co-Chairs of ICJW's Interfaith & Inter-cultural Committee report on some of the interesting interfaith and inter-cultural activities taking place around the world.

Involvement in interfaith and inter-cultural relations is one of ICJW's program priorities, and women from many ICJW affiliates are actively involved in meeting with people from other faiths and cultures, in order to foster understanding and overcome prejudice.

Nadine Iarchy reports that in Belgium, as in other parts of Europe, there is still a great deal of prejudice, even among the most educated. She gives talks about Judaism at schools, organizations and clubs, and provides information to journalists and university students. In November 2011, Nadine was involved in the a successful twinning weekend for Muslim and Jewish women as part of the Annual Weekend of Twinning organized by Foundation for Ethnic Understanding’s (FFEU) in cooperation with the World Jewish Congress and the Islamic Society of North America. This annual event brings together hundreds of synagogues and mosques, cultural centers, Muslim and Jewish university students and young leadership groups and Muslim and Jewish social action networks. According to the FFEU, these gatherings have helped Muslims and Jews in North America, Europe and around the world to nurture ties of friendship and trust. ICJW members are encouraged to find out about local twinning events and to get involved.

Nadine is also the Belgian representative for a project launched by UNESCO at the Brussels Parliament in March 2009. The Aladdin Project aims to promote harmonious intercultural relations, particularly among Jews and Muslims, and to facilitate mutual understanding by countering the falsification of the history of the Holocaust. The Project tackles the lack of objective information about the Shoah in the main languages of the Muslim world, starting with Arabic, Persian and Turkish, in societies where Holocaust history has never been taught and where it has remained largely a taboo subject. As part of its mission of promoting "knowledge of the other", Aladdin has also set itself the task of highlighting the historical evidence concerning the role of Muslim rulers and citizens who helped the Jews during World War 2. The positive reception that it has received, particularly in the Muslim world, has encouraged the organizers of Project Aladdin to enlarge its mission to include the centuries-long history of relations between Jews and Muslims. At the same time, it continues to develop ways of better acquainting Western audiences with the cultures and societies of the Islamic world.

Involvement in public commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day in January each year has become an important way of bringing together members of different faith communities with government representatives and non-governmental organizations to speak out against racial prejudice. In January 2012, ICJW affiliates and representatives took part in commemorative events in Wellington, New Zealand, at the New York headquarters of the United Nations, and in other cities worldwide.

ICJW's Argentinian affiliate, the Consejo Argentino de Mujeres Israelitas (CAMI) was involved in organizing a Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust organized by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, of Justice and Human Rights, an of Education, together with the Argentine Chapter of the International Group for the Remembrance of the Holocaust and the Argentina Judeo-Christian Fellowship. Eva Naiztein reports that CAMI members also participated in the World Day for Peace gathering in Assisi in October 2011, in a conference of Women of Monotheistic Faiths,
in a symposium on Social Rights organized by the AMIA Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires and the Catholic University of Argentina, and attended other meetings and celebrations involving people of different faiths. Eva has also completed a Leadership Training Course in Inter-Religious Dialogue.

In Australia, Robyn Lenn and Di Hirsh are actively involved in representing the NCJWA at interfaith and intercultural events in Sydney and Melbourne. In Sydney, Robyn organizes book and film discussions on a variety of topics for a group of women from many different cultures and faiths. Among the books they have read together are "The Hospital by the River" by Katherine Hamlin, "Sweetness in the Belly" by Camilla Gibb, "Gilead" by Marilynne Robinson, and "The Joy Luck Club" by Amy Tan. Their latest meeting was based on the book "Nine Lives" by William Dalrymple, with anthropologist Dr. Wendy Sinclair speaking about three Indian women of unusual faiths and cultures.

Di represents ICJW in Religions for Peace in Australia and is also involved in the Jewish Christian Muslim Association, helping to organize their annual 3-day residential women’s conference. She also organizes a Women’s Interfaith Model Seder each year before Passover, giving 90 women of many different faiths the opportunity to experience the joy and traditions of the Pesach service and meal. At the National Conference of NCJWA held during 2011, an interfaith panel comprising women from the Muslim, Sikh and Jewish communities discussed the topic "Civil Liberties and Religious Rights".

Di says: "Women have a special way of communicating and reaching out to one another that makes us ideal leaders in the interfaith area. We can and should lead the way in encouraging our own communities to learn more about those whose cultures and faiths are different to ours, strengthening our relationships and deepening our understanding of one another. We all have so much to gain."

Women's Research Prize

The ICJW Women’s Research Prize 2013 will honor an individual who has made an outstanding contribution in original research on a topic that advances an understanding of the role of Jewish women and their contribution as leaders in their communities and in Jewish society; addresses a way to improve the situation of Jewish women and analyzes their effectiveness in the world; and/or evaluates the place of women within the predominantly male leadership structures in Jewish life.

Leah Aharonov, Immediate Past President of ICJW, who heads the Women's Research Prize Committee, explains: "We know that there is much still to be learned about the role of Jewish women and from the role of Jewish women in Jewish life. The International Council of Jewish Women views this prize as a vehicle of recognition for those academics who have chosen to delve deeper into these topics, within the broader context of highlighting the significance and effectiveness of Jewish women within their communities."

The award consists of a certificate of recognition and a $1000 honorarium, which will be awarded at the ICJW's quadrennial Herczeg Jerusalem Education Seminar in Spring 2013.
CSW56: Empowering Rural Women

The 56th Annual Commission on the Status of Women took place from February 27 to March 9 in New York. Its theme was "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication development and current challenge". Representatives of ICJW, including President Sharon Gustafson, participated in many of the sessions, and also co-sponsored an NGO event.

ICJW partnered with Anglican Women's Empowerment to organize a session entitled "EMPOWERED: Rural Women 'Shout Out'", featuring accomplished rural women from Ghana, the Philippines, and a Native American woman. The conversation was facilitated by a representative from Vital Voices Global Partnership, an NGO that identifies, trains and empowers emerging women leaders and social entrepreneurs around the globe. Anglican Women’s Empowerment is a membership movement of Episcopal/ Anglican women and girls with a broad diversity of backgrounds, interests and skills who work for gender equity and social justice around the world.

ICJW organizer Madeleine Brecher explains: "ICJW chose to partner with Anglican Women's Empowerment because we both have a strong commitment to social justice issues and the advancement of women. When we realized that AWE was bringing rural women to New York who could speak on the priority theme, and ICJW was able to connect with Vital Voices to facilitate the program, we envisioned an exciting event and the deal was sealed!"

ICJW Events 2012-2013

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