

NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The past year has seen a period of global change, politically as well as environmentally. From shocks within governmental politics in the UK and the US, to the increasing rise of terrorism, along with the influx of refugees throughout Europe, and our awareness and acknowledgement of global climate change, we have all been forced to adapt to a different world.

Jewish communities have needed to recognise ongoing antisemitism masquerading as anti- Israel commentary. To this end, ICJW has made strong representations against the BDS movement with broad distribution of an educational document.

ICJW's motto *Promoting a Just Society based on Human Rights and Jewish Values* summarises the ethos of our organisation. ICJW's accredited representatives project the face of the International Council of Jewish Women to the world. As skilled and knowledgeable Jewish women, our representatives speak for and report on myriad issues pertinent to all women, not only Jewish women. ICJW has permanent NGO delegations to UN in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Paris, and sends accredited representatives to meetings of regional and global organisations, both Jewish and secular.

ICJW maintains an extensive global reach through our affiliated organisations and members in thirty five countries. As President of ICJW I have in the past year been privileged to extend my personal contact with ICJW affiliates and members. In addition to attending the Latin American Regional conference and Executive meeting in Mexico in October 2015, and the Executive meeting in Nashville May 2016, I have visited ICJW affiliate organisations and members in New Zealand, Cuba, Austria, Sweden, the UK, Panama, Colombia and South Africa, thereby expanding my understanding and appreciation of their very different projects and Jewish communities. Each such visit has renewed my respect and admiration for the hardworking and capable Jewish women who devote so much of their busy lives to volunteer work on behalf of others. Truly the International Council of Jewish Women is a remarkable organisation!

The Friends of ICJW Foundation, Inc. was established in 2015 to provide financial support for the mission and programs of ICJW. Thanks to this financial assistance, ICJW is able to maintain and strengthen its international influence, encouraging each affiliate to work for the improvement of the social, economic and legal status of all women under Jewish and civil law. Support for the Foundation will empower ICJW to create meaningful and productive change in communities worldwide.

Within this year's Newsletter you will find articles relevant to the core work of our organisation. Featured are several members of ICJW Executive and committees, each specialising in specific areas of ICJW programs. Do share your ICJW Newsletter with friends and family, as well as with members of your organisation!

With best wishes,

Robyn Lenn OAM

President, International Council of Jewish Women

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EDITOR: Bev Goldman

Women's Rights in Jewish Law

By Sharon Shenhav - International Women's Rights Lawyer specializing in Jewish Divorce and Chair of ICJW's Committee on the Status of Women in Jewish Law.



Today's Jewish women are highly educated and active in the work place, having successfully attained equal political, social, economic and educational rights. However, they are shocked to discover discrimination, unfairness and infringement of their human rights in Jewish religious life. No longer

willing to accept second class status in the Jewish community, ICJW women worldwide have challenged their religious and lay leaders to recognize their right to equal participation and equal rights.

ICJW has focused on the glaring discrimination against women in the Jewish divorce process, by publicizing the plight of *agunot*.

Understanding Jewish Marriage

Jewish marriage is basically a contract between two consenting parties. Unlike Catholic marriage, which is a sacrament, Jewish marriage does not have a need for a religious ceremony. Basically, a Jewish marriage requires only three elements:

1. Consent of parties, bride and groom
2. Two male adult witnesses
3. A gift of some monetary value from the groom to the bride, usually a wedding ring.

The marriage must be consummated by sexual intercourse and the parties must be of marriageable age. In Israel, a girl must be 17 years old in order to marry. It is a violation of criminal law to marry a girl under the age of 17, even if her parents consent.

Since the Jewish marriage is a contract requiring consent of both parties, it can only be ended by a divorce that involves both parties giving consent to the dissolution of the marriage.

Understanding Jewish Divorce

The problem of Jewish women who are unable to remarry because their husbands refuse to grant a religious divorce known as a *get* (the Hebrew term for a Jewish bill of divorcement) has been publicized widely in the media in recent years. These women are called *agunot* (Hebrew) or "chained women". Ancient Jewish law requires that a *get* must be voluntarily offered by the husband and accepted by the wife in order for a divorce to take place. Without a *get*, no Jewish woman in Israel can remarry, as legislation has granted a monopoly on marriage and divorce to the religious courts. Therefore, neither civil marriage nor divorce exists in Israel. Only religious law as interpreted by religious court judges, determines whether couples can marry or divorce.

Unlike the civil courts in most countries, in Israel the Jewish religious courts do not have authority to grant a divorce. Since Jewish marriage is contractual in nature, it requires the voluntary consent of both parties to the marriage. Similarly, the dissolution of the Jewish marriage can only take place

when both parties voluntarily consent to the breaking of the contract or the divorce. In Jewish communities outside Israel, where civil marriage and civil divorce are available, observant women who wish to remarry in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony must have a *get* in addition to the civil divorce. Thus the problem of the "chained woman" is not limited to Israel. Experts estimate that thousands of Jewish women throughout the world are *agunot*, chained to unwanted and non-existent marriages today because their husbands refuse to consent to the giving of the *get*.

The ICJW's Status of Women in Jewish Law Committee has prepared a list of activities which can be organized by ICJW affiliates to educate their communities on the discrimination against women in Jewish divorce. These activities can help to promote the work of your affiliate and engage your local religious leaders and lay members to act to end the infringement of Jewish women's rights in your community.



Human Rights – A Necessity

By Dr Karmela Bélinki Ph.D - ICJW delegate to the Council of Europe, and Chair of the ICJW Human Rights Committee.



Some aspects of human rights appear in all religions. The basic idea is expressed in the Ten Commandments, which form the ethical and moral ground for Judeo-Christian thinking. But human history has taken many by-roads away from these noble principles in the past countable millennia.

The modern idea of universal human rights was developed with the Nuremberg Trials after World War II, and expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948. There have been several other similar declarations focusing on specific groups.

Until the liberation of countries from colonialism, the first UN declaration was more or less generally accepted by its member states, but since then there have been many attempts to question the universality of these rights. Arguments have varied from some rights being culturally unacceptable, to openly political assertions that they are a Western invention and cannot be applied to everybody. Human rights have never been equally implemented by all the nations in the world.

Since its founding, the UN has deteriorated for various reasons, one being its basic structure giving one vote per member country. The majority of the members have little or no tradition of democracy, and many are still on the level of primitive thinking. It is widely known that

votes can be bought and that the focus of the present UN Human Rights Council is far from its purpose. From ICJW representatives in Geneva we know that there are special “Israel Bashing” days during its sessions, with Israel being singled out as the source of all evil. With the UN today dominated by different interest groups, it is no exaggeration to state that the original idea of moral and ethical equality between United Nations is failing today.

Human Rights is one of the most misused and abused terms in political life. This term has become a slogan rather than a universally accepted principle. These rights are today openly violated by many political systems, where the individual is seen as a threat to the collective. We see unrest even in established democracies, with growing rightist and leftist populism and calls for less rather than more freedoms. These trends are worrying symptoms of insecurity and a warning signal to all supporters of human rights.

The ICJW remains a practical exponent of the implementation of human rights, with its particular focus on women’s rights. It is therefore of the utmost importance that our organization is represented in all of the major international fora where human rights are respected as core values.



The dramatic ceiling mural of the UN Human Rights Council Hall in Geneva

Setting an Agenda for Global Change

An Interview with Sarah Secter - Vice Chair of ICJW's Environment and Sustainable Development Committee.



Sarah Secter was appointed in 2014 to the position of Vice Chair of Environment and Sustainable Development because of her work with environmental initiatives in Canada. She brings her very professional background to the portfolio, while at the same time encouraging younger women

to commit to playing a bigger role in *Tikkun Olam* – making the world a better place for all its citizens. In her own words: “I hope that my generation of women steps up to fill the shoes of our mothers and grandmothers, and realizes that no one else is going to do it for us. We have to be the change in the world that we want to see and speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.”

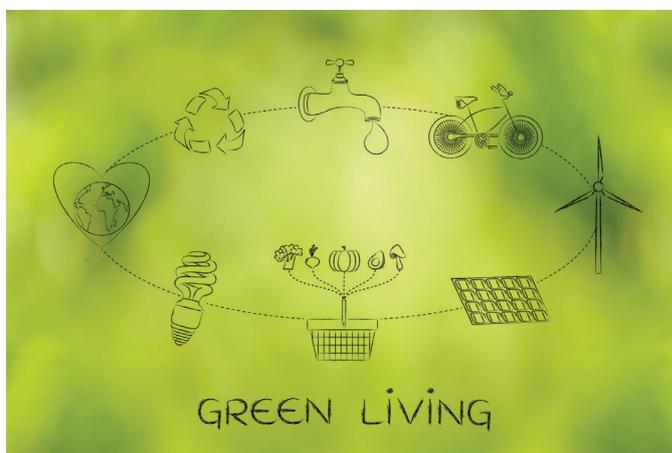
Sarah's involvement with the ICJW spans two generations. Her late grandmother Sadie Raber, and mother Sharon Allentuck were and are (respectively) heavily involved in the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, with her mother currently holding the position of National President, having also held many other positions. Sharon, a single mother with few childcare options, used to bring her daughter to the many of the meetings and programs of NCJW and the other organizations in which she was involved. This had a significant influence on how Sarah grew up, believing that volunteering and giving back is just a normal part of life.

Sarah holds a BA in Art History and Political Studies and worked in the arts industry for five years before earning her Bachelor of Education. She decided that she should do something “practical” to earn a dependable income and upward mobility, so she got her B. Ed and began a teaching career. Over the next five years she married and had two children, while watching her husband's career as an architect grow and become successful. At that point she decided to step

away from teaching, instead devoting herself to managing his architecture firm and growing her art consulting business.

Sarah believes that the Environment and Sustainable Development are arguably two of the most pressing issues confronting the world today. The initiatives that she wants to put on the ICJW agenda include fossil fuel divestment; reducing organizational carbon footprints at local, national and international levels; raising awareness of pressing environmental issues; and the sustainable food movement. These are all of vital concern internationally, but even more so in developing countries, where poverty is endemic and where, without the correct education, issues around the environment are generally side-lined and even ignored.

At the recent ICJW Executive meeting in Nashville Sarah had put a strong case for divestment from fossil fuels as a protective environmental measure. This stimulated vigorous discussion.



Sarah also voiced strong sentiments about the still prevalent culture of male domination and inequality around the world. While she feels fortunate to live in Canada where she is afforded equal rights, that however does not mean that she is free from discrimination. Women are still victims of abuse, trafficked in the sex trade, paid less than men, objectified and demeaned. There is much work still to be done in the field of gender equality.

Women's Economic Empowerment

By Jackie King - Founder and CEO of Project Deborah, a capacity building project for women, Director of National Foundation of Australian Women, and a member of the ICJW Status of Women Committee.



One of the biggest structural barriers to women's economic empowerment is that the majority of caring and domestic responsibilities still fall upon the shoulders of women, making the reality of their lives somewhat incompatible with the expectations of work. Studies show that even

when working full time, women still do more housework than men. A lot more.

Even today, assumptions about women's priorities and the management of competing considerations suggest that a woman will be less committed to her career than to her family. This has a structural impact on opportunities for women's career advancement and increased pay, which further affects many women's decisions to remain at home.

Ann Marie Slaughter in her book "Unfinished Business" (2015) suggests that the values that women bring to the workplace, in terms of care, multi-tasking, efficiency, interpersonal and organisational skills, should be given higher value. There needs to be a fundamental recognition of the value of care in order for real economic empowerment to become a reality.

Evidence suggests that success in a job is generally the result of the fit between the person's personality and skills and the job's requirements. However, research also shows that men in senior roles are more likely to appoint or promote someone with a style similar to their own. Furthermore, women tend to undersell their experience and capabilities, and have expectations that their partners will share half of the unpaid work load at home, which tends not to be reflected in reality as life moves on. This lack of economic empowerment for women starts from the point of college graduation, is reinforced by lack of superannuation because of reduced earnings, and is widened further if women elect to have children.

It would be helpful if we could change our understanding of work as outcome-based or results-focused rather than process-

based. The primary consideration should be an employee's ability to get the work done, rather than the number of hours that they are present at the office.

The Jewish community is well placed to model such a change in workplace culture. In her seminal article in Atlantic Magazine (2013): "Why Women Can't Have it All", Ann Marie Slaughter states:

I have worked with many Orthodox Jewish men who observed the Sabbath from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. Jack [would] leave the office early enough on Friday afternoon...He would not work on Friday after sundown or all day Saturday. Everyone who knew him, including me, admired his commitment to his faith and his ability to carve out the time for it, even with an enormously demanding job. It is hard to imagine, however, that we would have the same response if a mother told us she was blocking out mid-Friday afternoon through the end of the day on Saturday, every week, to spend time with her children. I suspect this would be seen as unprofessional, an imposition of unnecessary costs on co-workers. In fact, of course, one of the great values of the Sabbath—is precisely that it carves out a family oasis, with rituals and a mandatory setting-aside of work.



Talking About Israel: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Excerpts from an article by Lynda Ben-Menashe - Community Relations Manager at the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies in Australia, and member of the ICJW Interfaith & Intercultural Committee.



Israel: Everyone talks about it – the media, politicians, and NGOs. Now it's our turn. We want to talk about Israel. So let's talk about the good, the bad and the ugly of Israel.

So what's good?

One of the best things about Israel is its role as a global leader in technological,

medical and other innovations, and in delivering humanitarian aid around the world. In short, Israel is the embodiment of *Tikkun Olam* – fixing the world.

A basic rule of advocacy is to assume that people know nothing, but talk to them as if you think that they do know stuff. Personal stories are always the most powerful because they appeal to the heart and they stick in the memory. So use your stories to reach the hearts of others.

So let's move to the bad.

There are plenty of bad things about Israel – like any other country it's imperfect but, unlike any other country, it exists in the worst neighbourhood on earth, and that inescapable reality makes much of the 'ordinary' bad much worse.

The most terrible thing most commonly attributed to Israel is apartheid, being one of the cardinal sins of the post-modern world. The worst default response that Jews give to this accusation is that Israel is not an apartheid state because Arabs have it better in Israel than in any Arab country.

So here's another basic rule of advocacy: challenge false beliefs by giving context and balance in a respectful appeal to the intelligence and good judgement of your audience. Is

Israel an apartheid state? Interestingly, 25% of Israel's citizens are not Jewish. They have the same rights as all their fellow Israeli citizens – voting, healthcare, and education. Israel is absolutely not perfect – there is definitely discrimination against some minorities - but isn't that the case in every single society, including our own?

In fact, the term 'apartheid' would be best applied to the laws against Palestinians in Lebanon. Even after living there for more than 60 years, Palestinians are still prohibited by law from owning property, and they are denied other basic rights. Now that's apartheid.

And what about the ugly?

To my mind, 'antisemitism' is the ugly in the conversation about Israel. Sadly, the line between legitimate criticism of Israel and rank antisemitism in public discourse today often seems totally blurred. The antisemitism is out there, and it has gotten ugly.

So, what should we do?



Lucy Aharish is an Israeli-Arab news presenter, reporter and television host

To paraphrase the Jewish sage Hillel, if we are for ourselves but only for ourselves, then who are we? It is important for us to fight against the injustices enacted both here and overseas, against our Christian friends and our Yazidi friends and others.

In short we should be, as members of Am Israel, a light unto the nations. Not because we are better than other nations, although we should strive to be. But because one benefit of our millennia experience is that it enables us to discern the patterns of history when they are repeated. It is our role to shed light on these patterns, using Israel as a lens, for the benefit of all humanity.

The Power of Women in Israel

By Bev Goldman - National Vice-President of the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa and editor of the ICJW newsletter.



Feminism – or to be politically correct, gender equality – in Israel is a slew of contradictions. “Once made equal to man, woman becomes his superior,” said Socrates. Israeli women – Jewish, Muslim and/or Christian – are the definite embodiment of that maxim. Strong and vocal, assertive and self-confident,

determined and forceful, they seem to thrive in a society that often only pays lip-service to their equality in Israeli society.

But that is not to say the picture is completely negative. In many cases women have breached the glass ceiling. 34% of all soldiers and 57% of all officers in the Israel Defence Forces are women, as is the Commander of the Manpower Directorate. The President of the Supreme Court, the Governor of the Bank of Israel, and the Deputy Governor and Supervisor of Banks are all women. So is the director of Shurat Hadin, the Israel Law Centre, which is a world leader in the fight to stop terrorism funding across the world. Three of the CEOs of Israel’s five big banks - Bank Leumi, Israel Discount Bank and First International Bank – are women, and so too is the controlling shareholder of Bank Hapoalim.

Yet of the 20 ministers in the current Israeli government, only three are women (Miri Regev, Minister of Culture and Sport; Ayelet Shaked, Justice; and Gila Gamliel, Senior Services); and there is only one deputy minister (Tzipi Hotovely, Foreign Affairs). There have only ever been two female State Attorneys in the country, and only ever one President of the Supreme Court of Israel.

In 2004, Israel ranked 35th out of 135 on the Gender Index of the World Economic Forum. In 2015 it ranked 53rd, having dropped 18 places. Statistically, Israel ranks 71st out of 135 countries in economic equality; on average women take home

– and have done for the past three decades – only 66% of men’s earnings. At the end of 2014, the average monthly income for an Israeli woman was 7,439 shekels (\$1,900), while for a man it was 11,114 shekels (\$2,800).

Today only six of Israel’s 100 top traded companies are run by women; and only 5.5% of the top 500 companies, compared with 8% in 2010. Women chair only 4% of Israel’s boards of directors, down from 5% in 2010, and only 18% of board members are women.

Women now head only six (2%) of the municipalities in Israel, down from 8 in 2010; and Israel’s government ranks 6th from the bottom of the gender equality ladder out of 34 OECD countries.



65% of Israeli women serve in the Israeli Defence Forces

In 2010, the majority of students studying for an Israeli university degree in science were women, despite the gender imbalance in its professional scientific fields. In the 2014-2015 academic year, there were some 311,800 higher education students in Israel, 58% of whom were women, with 81% of these in education faculties, teaching future teachers.

But Israel is filled with women who succeed in the face of all odds, who defy stereotypes, and who wield great influence, both in the corridors of power and behind the scenes. These women make the ICJW proud!

ICJW Events



ICJW Executive Meeting in Nashville, USA, May 2016



ICJW Executive Meeting in Mexico, October 2015

ICJW CALENDAR

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| November 13 – 17, 2016 | ICJW European Regional Conference and Executive Meeting in Madrid, Spain: “Sephardic Heritage – From Survival to Revival” |
| May 14 – 18, 2017 | Herczeg Education Seminar and Executive Meeting in Tel Aviv, Israel: “ICJW and Israel – Partnering for Life” |
| November 13 – 14 (& optional 15), 2017 | Executive Meeting in London, UK. |
| May 27 – 31, 2018 | ICJW International Convention and Executive Meeting in Sydney, Australia. |