

## Message from the President

Dear Friends,

I hope you enjoy this 2020 edition of E-LINKS. Because of the upheaval in the world at the moment, we decided to concentrate on how our Affiliates are responding to the challenges of COVID-19 and other global disasters that have occurred recently.



As always, ICJW has changed and adapted to maintain our goal of *Promoting a Just Society based on Human Rights and Jewish Values*. Never have these Rights and Values been under more sustained attack, and never has our work been more critical. Please circulate E-LINKS to all your members and use it as a PR tool to showcase our work to others.

My sincere thanks to Clarita Spitz and Dee Hart, our Community Service Coordinators, for their work in collecting the articles.

Keep safe and well. With every good wish,

*Penny*

**Penelope Conway**  
President, ICJW

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<b>When Disaster Strikes:</b>	
Croatia’s Earthquake	2
Australia’s Bushfires	3
<b>Rising to the Challenge:</b>	
Working together in South Africa & Mexico	4
Australia’s “Days for Girls” Project	5
<b>Coping with Covid-19:</b>	
France, Ecuador, Cuba, Costa Rica	6
Colombia, Israel, Panama	7
USA & Canada	8-9
<b>Before Corona:</b>	
Hungary, the Czech Republic & Slovakia	10
Park Opening in Colombia	11

## Introduction to E-Links

It is with mixed feelings that we present to you our 2020 E-LINKS issue. The contents reflect these feelings: the impact of COVID-19 in our lives, and the continuous effort of ICJW women to better this world of ours. We aimed to find a balance and included articles on the different ways our Affiliates are adapting and responding to the crisis, as well as activities carried out prior to the pandemic and those that had to be cancelled due to the new restrictions.

We have witnessed the efforts of all our Affiliates, who responded immediately to help others, providing food and other basic needs to the most affected and vulnerable populations, rising to the challenge and contributing to better the world, in accordance with the Jewish concept of *tikun olam*.

The times we are living in have brought an awareness of the fragility and value of life. Our lives have changed in many ways and we are experiencing many things for the first time - our first Zoom meeting, our first virtual Pesach Seder, our first online concert. We are learning and adapting to the new situation, hoping that, when this is over, we will emerge stronger and better people.

With our best wishes and deepest gratitude,  
**Clarita Spitz and Deirdre Hart,**  
ICJW Community Services Coordinators

**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN**

Email: [president@icjw.org](mailto:president@icjw.org) or [office@icjw.org](mailto:office@icjw.org)

[www.icjw.org](http://www.icjw.org)

## Double Disaster in Croatia

Melita Svob, President of the [Union of Jewish Women of Croatia](#), reports on the double crisis of an earthquake that hit Zagreb during the Covid-19 lockdown.

There were severe earthquakes in Zagreb on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and a series of after-shocks followed, endangering the entire city. Many hospitals, museums, concert hall, churches, Cathedral, government buildings, faculties, galleries, cemetery, theatres, academy of sciences and thousands of houses were damaged. One especially dramatic moment was when women were rescued from the Maternity Hospital, together with newborn babies and babies in incubators. There was one death and 25 people were hurt.

The epicentre of the quake was in the village of Markuševac near Zagreb, where all the houses were destroyed. I remember this place because I was hidden there for some time as child during the Holocaust. Those whose homes were demolished were housed in a student dormitory, and many field kitchens were opened in the parks by the Red Cross, Caritas, and town or church organizations.

In Zagreb, many Jewish community buildings were destroyed, including the communal centre, the nursing home, and the office building. The Jewish Museum, Synagogue, Library, Club and many offices are seriously damaged. Many members' homes were damaged and some people had to move out - some were placed in a Jewish old age home which is also damaged. We have been fortunate that no one was hurt.

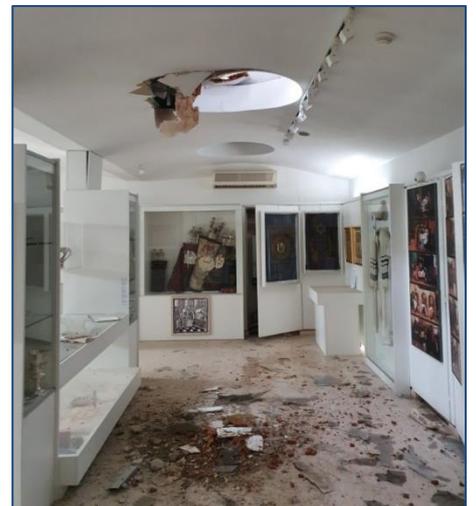
Because the earthquake occurred during the national lockdown for the Coronavirus pandemic, a central headquarters was organized by the epidemiologists, the Minister of Health, the Interior Minister and Chief of Hospital for Infectious Disease, which ordered strict measures and very effectively contained the infection (there were 1,600 cases with only about 30 deaths at the time of writing). The army cleared the streets, stopped all traffic, and closed all stores, restaurant, shopping and other centres, other than pharmacies and bakeries.

When the Coronavirus epidemic started, the president of the Jewish community in Zagreb, Dr. Ognjen Kraus, had immediately banned all gatherings, community activities, and religious services. Staff were working from their homes and most old people stayed isolated in their homes, so that until now we have had no case of virus infection. Social services (the Claims Social Fund, Ana Hermanovic) and social workers are very well organized, with food deliveries organized for the old age home, plus nurses and other help.

For the Passover holidays, some groceries and open markets were allowed to open with very strict controls. I am recovering from a heart attack, but I also have an office in my home and have contact with my survivors, not only in Zagreb but also in other communities.



*Mothers with newborn babies evacuated from the hospital*



*Damaged Jewish community centre in Zagreb*

## Australia's Devastating Bushfires



The [National Council of Jewish Women of Australia](#) was involved in the efforts to assist those affected by a season of devastating bushfires.

From December 2019 to March 2020, unprecedented and intense fires swept across New South Wales and Victoria, the eastern states of Australia. 18.6 million hectares (46 million acres; 186,000 square kms; 72,000 square miles) of bush and agricultural land was severely burned, 34 people died and more than 3,500 homes were destroyed. An estimated one billion native animals perished, including some endangered species.

Because of this terrible bushfires disaster, it was decided that **NCJWA Victoria** should donate directly to one of the agencies involved in crisis support for the people affected. As they are a Victorian Incorporated Association, only Victorian causes could be supported. Consequently, NCJWA's Victoria branch made a significant donation to Foodbank Victoria, which is a non-denominational agency with a long history and a good reputation. They felt this was the best way of helping, as giving directly to an established agency experienced in disaster relief meant that the money could be used quickly and effectively.

33 special toiletries kits plus a large box of assorted toiletries were delivered to Operation Angel, which supported evacuees and those working on the frontlines of the fire. NCJWA Vic members collected and donated toiletries throughout the year as part of our Mitzvah Day efforts. They also promoted the Jewish Bushfire Relief Fund through the JCCV appeal on our website and social media channels. **NCJWA's Gold Coast** branch raised over \$1,200 in a Bushfire Appeal, which was donated to the Country Women's Association of New South Wales Disaster Relief Fund.



Click here to follow ICJW  
on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)  
@ICJWomen



## Working Together Separately!

The [Union of Jewish Women](#) in South Africa has remained active with some of their projects by being involved in helping their communities at this very challenging time. As they were in a country-wide lockdown they could not leave their homes, so had to negotiate through other parties or projects in the field or financially. Here are some examples of the activities of one of their six branches.

The Durban branch of UJW assisted the South African Board of Deputies KwaZulu-Natal Council to set up a dormitory for the care staff at the Beth Shalom Old Age Home by collecting mattresses, bedding, magazines, and storage containers.

They purchased 224 reusable fabric masks for the Neo-natal Department in King Edward Hospital. These masks are a 'wear one - wash one' concept. The mothers of the premature babies were given the masks to wear, allowing the department to use the medical masks for medical purposes.

The UJW women collected playing cards and sports equipment and sent them to the various homeless shelters to occupy those being housed there during lockdown. They also delivered diapers and baby formula to a housing area for the poorest of the poor, who have no food or financial resources.



*Kendyll Jacobson from UJW handing over the masks to Dr Hadebe from the Neonatal Department of King Edward Hospital.*

## Collaboration in Mexico

One of our two Mexico affiliates [Federación Femenina de la Comunidad Judía](#) is an umbrella organization comprising 29 Jewish women's organizations. President Lisa Sourujon reports that, during the Coronavirus pandemic, they have expanded to include **50 female volunteer organizations and institutions**

"We have joined forces to help people that have been affected by the situation. Each organization works independently but some have joined forces in order to avoid duplicating efforts. There have been drives to provide food, medication and financial aid to those in need. Help is being distributed within the Jewish community and to local hospitals and poorer areas within the country as well. Psychological and medical assistance is also being provided.

The Federación is also working in partnership with Cadena, a non-profit Jewish civil association dedicated to preventing and assisting in crises and disasters. In the past, they have participated in women's missions to remote and vulnerable parts of the country. Now, they are working with Cadena and their volunteers, who are young and properly trained, to distribute food and medicine.

In light of the emergency, we found a greater need to unite. We have amazing women who give their time and effort selflessly to help others. We are strong, we are proud, and we pour our hearts every day into our jobs! We don't know what the future holds for us, but we do know that the Women's Federation of the Mexican Jewish Community is growing stronger every day."

## Days for Girls Project

Ruth Shteinman, Chair of the Days for Girls Committee of the [National Council of Jewish Women of Australia](#) NSW Section, explains how they are fighting Period Poverty.

Days For Girls (DfG) is an established global group with which our branch of the NCJWA is linked. It addresses the plight of thousands of young women in impoverished places without access to sanitary care. Its volunteer teams create reusable sanitary kits, packed into colourful cotton drawstring backpacks.

I came to DfG when seeking ways to use my 50th birthday as a way to contribute to female health. Through this organization, I became aware of the daunting scale of Period Poverty, a complex problem that begins with the harsh monthly reality of having to sit on cardboard or rags. A girl without relief misses crucial school time and life's possibilities diminish, so she is likely to marry earlier and have more children. In the developing world, a higher portion of female wages funnel to her family than that of a male. Without a daughter or sister working, her people feel the impact.

The DfG solution rests on supplying sanitary kits, and as a craft artist I recognized kit-making as creativity with a noble purpose. Inside that appealing backpack is a package including winged pads, liners and underpants, with a face washer and calendar to track cycles, with a waterproof transport bag and small hotel soap. DfG runs kit-making workshops internationally, welcoming volunteer involvement and providing training for kits to be assembled and distributed in local places of need. They also offer courses in reproductive education for girls *and* boys.

I proposed participation with DfG to my Chapter of NCJW Australia, and after approval we formed a Days for Girls Committee. Our initial events were an immediate success. Seventy-five volunteers joined, with three generations workshoping together around tables (pictured below). In 2019, we assembled 1,200 liners for 150 kits; a good start.



Anticipation was building for our largest ever event in May 2020, but of course the pandemic made that impossible. In Zoom discussions, the Committee resolved to adapt our method for volunteers to assemble packs in their own homes.

In these times, working with hands is a solace, and a real bonus to our own community has been the advent of purposeful activity for those languishing in isolation. Our coordinators are a welcome sight at pickup, even with social distancing. All coordinators wear masks and gloves, and all materials are sanitized on leaving their care. Though this phase is still in progress it is clear that this remains in every way a positive community activity, beneficial to the makers as well as the receivers.

## Updates from Around the World

### FRANCE

Our French affiliate, the [Coopération Féminine](#), was preparing for Pesach when Covid-19 struck. Their volunteers delivered bags of Pesach cakes to the medical team of the British Hospital near Paris. The ESAT Centre for Handicapped Jewish People, which is managed by Coopération Féminine, closed its doors to visitors on the first day of confinement, but its 70 residents are all in good health. During lockdown, volunteers are maintaining links with fragile and old people from the community, and with families of the handicapped, who are very anguished.



### CUBA

In Cuba, volunteers from the local ICJW affiliate [Asociacion Femenina de Cuba](#) worked with the American Jewish Distribution Committee (JDC) to collect and distribute kosher food before Passover (pictured on the left) for community members, whose lives have become even more because of the pandemic.

### ECUADOR

In Ecuador, the [Sociedad Femenina Israelita de Quito](#) usually supports local Jewish seniors, delivering Jalot (bread) for every Shabbat and food for the festivals, celebrating every birthday with those over 80 years old, and visiting those who are sick. Since Coronavirus restrictions were enforced in mid-March, they have been working hard to support the elderly of the community through phone calls and other technological methods.

### COSTA RICA

The [Association of Volunteers Ladies of B'nei Israel](#) in Costa Rica had planned two traditional events for the month of March, but both were cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The first was a traditional Passover Seder for Women, and the second was a social welfare project for the Day of Good Deeds. They planned to deliver the donations that they had collected throughout the year and hold a party for 100 impoverished children who receive two meals every day at the Hogar San Lázaro. Instead they decided to ask for donations and provide the Hogar San Lázaro with basic food and cleaning products to help them during lockdown.



## Updates from Around the World

### COLOMBIA

Lotty Eidelman, President of the [Fundacion Amigos De La Comunidad Golda Meir in Barranquilla, Colombia](#), reports that the Jewish community of Barranquilla, together with the Hebrew School and the Golda Meir Foundation, delivered food packages to the parents and grandparents of the Golda Meir School pupils. “We continue providing help to the needy families of the Golda Meir Community, located in this very depressed zone of Barranquilla, the Las Americas neighborhood. At the last count on May 15 2020, we have been able to deliver 865 packages of food supplies. May we always continue helping those who need it in the tradition of the mitzvah of Tzedaka and Tikun Olam, so important to Judaism.”



Read below about the School's new Park, and [click here to follow the Fundacion on Instagram](#).

### ISRAEL

The [Council of Women's Organizations in Israel](#) (CWOI) is today mainly engaged in the gendered response to Covid-19 emergency measures and its impact on women. However, the greater challenge we are facing today is a response to another pandemic - violence against women, which has become more acute as a consequence of the current crisis. CWOI called for a global coalition to raise awareness and respond to women's immediate needs: emergency shelters, transitional housing, socio and physical care and emergency services. This included deliveries of food and essential supplies for vulnerable women and children who have been forced to leave their homes to escape domestic violence.

The problem of unemployed single mothers and pregnant women during the current economic crisis is particularly acute and has necessitated a prompt reaction. CWOI President Oshrit Sitbon and WIZO Chair Ora Corazim, working with the leaders of other women's organizations and with help from some parliamentarians, managed to prevent the firing of pregnant women.

CWOI also organized that hundreds of plants to be donated to Israel's medical staff, caregivers and front-line healthcare workers, as a gesture of appreciation from Israel's population.



*CWOI President Oshrit Setbon distributing plants to nurses.*

### PANAMA

Tania de Levy, President of the **Sisterhood Kol Shearit Israel in Panama**, reports that they have been running events and courses online for their community during the Covid lockdown. These include a book club, classes for children, youth and adults, Passover conferences, and talks with rabbis. One of their members collects money to bring food to doctors at different hospitals.

## Updates from Around the World

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the [National Council of Jewish Women USA](#) cancelled their 48th Convention - “Jewish Feminism: Honoring the Past, Shaping the Future” - scheduled for April in Chicago, IL. Over 20 dynamic workshops on leadership, programming, organizing and advocacy, and diversity, equity, and inclusion had been planned. Felicia Anchor, ICJW Regional Chair for North America reports on what the NCJW has been doing during lockdown.

#### Advocacy Updates

- NCJW is urging Congress to consider women, children, and families in the next Coronavirus package by incorporating critical priorities surrounding reproductive health, rights, and justice; health care; economic justice; voter engagement; domestic violence; and many other critical issues.
- The Supreme Court heard a challenge to the Trump administration’s rules that allow virtually any employer or university to deny birth control coverage guaranteed by the Affordable Care Act. NCJW organized a virtual rally to say #HandsOffMyBC.
- The current pandemic is changing how we work on Getting Out the Vote (GOTV), but it won’t stop us. We do not have to choose between a healthy population and a healthy democracy.

#### NCJWebinars

In mid-March, NCJW launched two series bi-weekly webinars: a NCJWebinar Leadership series for their leadership network and a NCJWebinar Advocate series. The leadership series covered topics such as how to move in-person meetings online, how to fundraise for our sections, and navigating crises through a non-profit lens. The Advocate series covered topics such as protecting the vote during the pandemic, direct service in the age of coronavirus, and advocating for at-risk populations amidst a pandemic. [NCJWebinar Advocate series](#) recordings are available online.

#### NCJW Section Spotlight

Here are some examples of the impact that our Sections are making in their communities:

- The Chicago North Shore Section Mother’s Day Project supports two area domestic violence shelters by providing Mother’s Day baskets for the women at the shelters.
- The New York City Section is providing bagged meals and pre-packaged bags of food at their Community Kitchen and Food Pantry. The Food Pantry provides a three-day emergency supply of both fresh produce and shelf-stable groceries to families in need once a week. The Community Kitchen provides bagged meals twice a week.
- The St. Louis Section is continuing their Healing Hearts Bank, a micro-lending program that provides underserved women and families with micro-loans of up to \$500 to help further their financial independence.
- The Sacramento Section organized #Sew2Save so they can help during this crisis by sewing masks. NCJW Sacramento dropped off 150 masks for the Dignity Health care system. More than 30 volunteers are participating in this project.

[Click here](#) for addition examples of Direct Service from NCJW Sections during the pandemic.

## Updates from Around the World

### CANADA

Debbie Wasserman, President of the [National Council of Jewish Women of Canada](#) shares uplifting stories from Toronto and their national anti-trafficking campaign.

**Toronto Section** worked to make the Passover Food Drive become a reality amid so many unprecedented obstacles. The Drive was ready to commence - all food ordered, the recipient list completed - they were ready for the groups to come in to pack the necessary boxes (around 2000) and arrange for drivers for the delivery day. Toronto Section realized the difficulties to fulfil their Passover Food Drive this year in a safe way. The UJA heard the Drive could not be completed as hoped and came to the rescue by offering to take care of the packaging and delivery. The recipients have already received their packages, very much appreciated especially during these difficult times.

Toronto's **Project Lisa**, a bridge for women in abusive or violent circumstances, is working hard to connect to its clients. Many women are reaching out for our help more than ever, as families in crisis are often confined within close quarters. Over the past year we have provided practical assistance for 37 adult women and 36 children. In complex, challenging cases, assistance consisted of referrals to vetted lawyers, accompanying women to court and to legal appointments, and helping them to move past their trauma by connecting them to community resources.

The NCJWC officers are in the beginning stages of working together to create some sort of presentation dealing with **Women and Trauma** to be offered to all members of NCJWC to view. During these stressful times, we see a need to reach out and believe that this vehicle could be extremely helpful.

### Human Trafficking

NCJWC continues to concentrate on educating the public about **Human Trafficking's** existence within our country. NCJWC had been preparing for an online blitz of Human Trafficking Awareness on Mother's Day when our city declared a state of emergency due to Covid 19.

Our focus has been on mothers and daughters, suggesting that strong, open and trusting relationships may be a factor in averting victimization. We had a mother daughter team available to video their story. The daughter had been trafficked and the mother has been speaking to groups about the horrors of her daughter's experience and how mothers can play an important role in prevention and healing. We were not able to meet with the mother and daughter in person due to social distancing and so alternative arrangements are being made for them to have an online conversation on Mother's Day.

We have been made aware that during this pandemic, traffickers are connecting with girls on social media and grooming them in time for the lifting of restrictions. The criminal activities continue amidst these challenging times.

## Conferences in Hungary and the Czech Republic

[The Esther's House Association for Jewish Culture and Feminist Values](#) in Hungary organized a major conference in November 2019, with the topic and title: “*Building a Jewish Identity - Building a Jewish Community: Contemporary Jewish Perspectives on Jewish Traditions*”. The sessions included: the individual and communal challenges of being a Jewish woman; Jews and Tikkun Olam (fixing the world); new challenges in some religious communities; and the Jewish family, based on recent research by cultural anthropologists. The participants engaged in new interactions, including conversations with a Muslim intercultural group and a LMBTQ group. There was a discussion about cultural diversity and about the problems of converted Jewish women, and a lecture on the stereotypical representations of Jewish women in films. The event concluded with an evening concert by the Trio Sefarad. The texts of the lectures were published in the Jewish Review “*Approaches*”, in April 2020, and online on the [Esther's House Facebook page](#).

In October 2019, the [Czech Council of Jewish Women](#) (CCJW) organized an event in Prague, during the FORUM 2000 Festival of Democracy, entitled “*People of Conflict: Civil struggle for peace between Israelis and Palestinians*”. The speakers were Israeli lawyer Jean-Marc Liling, a religious Jew and an activist specializing in migration and refugees, and Palestinian activist Ali Abu Awwad, a former Palestine Fatah activist and founder of the non-violence Taghyeer (Change) and Shorashim (Roots) organizations in the West Bank, which promote dialogue and confidence-building between the two sides as the only way to peace. Together they have founded “Karama” (Dignity) with other local activists, to support activities encouraging dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Jews, Muslims and Christians. The event received financial support from ICJW's Isabelle Brown Fund.

## Celebrations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

The [CCJW](#) has been working to revive the Czech tradition of synagogue music, with a Cantorial Shabbat in February 2020 in Prague. Israeli Cantors Yitzchak Zelman and Yotam Segal performed for the community in the Old-New Synagogue on Shabbat. On Saturday night another concert took place in the 19th century Maisel Synagogue, with a lecture on the tradition of cantorial music in Bohemia by Veronika Seidl, Professor of Ethnology at Charles University.



[Association ESTER](#) in Slovakia celebrated Tu B'Shvat (the New Year for Trees) with an event organized in cooperation with local Israeli students for the whole Jewish community of Košice.

## Opening the Golda Meir Park in Colombia

In April 2017, the [Fundacion Amigos De La Comunidad Golda Meir in Barranquilla, Colombia](#) handed the Golda Meir School that they had built for disadvantaged children in the Las Americas neighborhood, to the District for its management. They took on a new challenge, setting up the Golda Meir Community Development Center (CDC), where they work to complement the formal education of children by promoting values such as respect, solidarity, family, friendship, and teamwork. They accompany mothers who are heads of households, pregnant and lactating mothers, and they share activities with local seniors, who enrich our lives with their joy, their knowledge and experiences.

Lotty Eidelman explains: “The success of this new experience encouraged us to let our imagination run wild, to dream and to think... what to do with the piece of land behind the school, full of brush, where the rainwater accumulated, making it a focus of disease and undermining the center physical structure? This is how the idea of a recreation Park came to be. A space that would impact the quality of life of the inhabitants of Barrio Las Américas, allowing them to meet through recreation, sports and healthy fun. The Park will bring oxygen to the neighborhood ecosystem, smiles to the children's faces, and enable families to gather in a recreational area, demonstrating citizen culture while taking care of it.



*The official opening of the Golda Meir Park (above) and kids playing on the toys (below).*



On February 27 2020, in a very festive atmosphere, we inaugurated the Golda Meir Park. The ceremony was presided by the Mayor of the City, Jaime Pumarejo, and was attended by the Honorary President of the FGM, Mrs. Susie Steckerl de Schmulson and her family, members of the FGM Board of Directors, Mrs. Lotty Eidelman, Clara Kovalski, Clarita Spitz, Elena Carriazo, the president of the Jewish community Abraham Oksemberg, Rabbi Julian Vainstein, members of our community, the former principals of the Golda Meir School, and a group of seniors, mothers and children who are CDC beneficiaries.

Over the years, the Golda Meir Foundation has been faithful to the Jewish concept of *tikun olam*, which teaches us that our actions must contribute to better the world. This new space will contribute to the training of young people focused on sports, not drugs or street gangs; keeping teenagers free of pregnancies, proud and valuing their gender. A community empowered and devoted to get out of the circle of stagnation.”