



NATIONAL REPORT ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISRAEL

”BEIJING +10”

**The Authority for the Advancement
of the Status of Women
The Prime Minister's Office
MARCH 2005**

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Introduction by the Director of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women

The first pioneers who drained the swamps before the establishment of the State; the Kibbutzim which championed total equality between men and women; the first female Prime Minister of Israel, Mrs. Golda Meir; the women pilots serving in the Israel Defense Forces - all these are unique milestones in the advancement of the status of women in Israel.

Israel is a leader in the promotion of the status of women, through new and innovative laws, advanced legal system and diverse activities for the advancement of women by governmental and non-governmental authorities - a description of which may be found in this brochure.

Our new goal is to exhaust and maximize these achievements for every man and woman in Israel.

To this end, important activity is being carried out in the following fields:

1. Constantly updating the legislation regarding gender equality, and significantly empowering the authorities responsible for enforcing these laws.
2. Education, public relations and personal awareness - knowledge and consciousness are power!
3. Initiating and spearheading a feasible plan for the advancement of women, expanding and enhancing the number of the agents of change in the community, and training women to compete on decision-making positions in the country.

Achieving the goal of equal opportunities for women is a process of social change which should be evaluated over time.

I believe that Israel's impressive achievements in creating increased awareness on the one hand, and the diverse activities for the advancement of the status of women carried out in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations on the other, will help us to rapidly achieve the goal of equal opportunities for men and women in the State of Israel.

Sincerely,

Yehudit Plotkin, Director

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women

Introduction by the Deputy Director of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women

As one who has served as the Deputy Director of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women since its establishment in 1998, and is responsible for coordinating Israel's international activity for the advancement of the status of women, It is an honor to present the national report of the State of Israel, which details the steps taken following the Beijing Conference.

I wish to stress the welcome initiative of female Members of Knesset, from the entire political spectrum in Israel, which led to the establishment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women at the Prime Minister's Office, following the first Beijing Conference.

Israel is fortunate to have progressive laws and rich activities of associations and women's organizations. However, we must do more to ensure that women fill more key roles in decision-making positions, in the government and the economy, in order to influence all aspects of life.

Especially in these days, in which we pursue a peace process with our neighbors, I hope that women will be able to work together and assist peace in the Middle East.

Sincerely,

**Merry Hadayer, Deputy Director
The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women**

THE AUTHORITY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISRAEL

In March, 1998, marking International Women's Day, the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) voted unanimously to establish the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women. As a body, established and maintained by law, the Authority has proven to be a vital force for women's equality.

The functions of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel include:

- Coordinating and promoting cooperation between state government, municipalities and others in the areas of women's status;
- Monitoring and follow-up of the activities of the various government offices which relate to the topics that have been assigned to the Authority;
- Advising the ministries on the implementation of laws relating to the Authority's jurisdiction;
- Ensuring that the recommendations of the State Comptroller on these issues are implemented;
- Deepening public awareness, which includes the educational system and the media regarding the topics that the Authority oversees;
- Formulating policy regarding gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women;
- Acting as an information center as well as initiating research on the topics the Authority oversees;
- Establishing special programs and services for women which promote gender equality;
- Promoting the implementation of CEDAW;
- Preparing the official periodic reports according to CEDAW;
- Initiating and maintaining ties with international organizations and organizations in other countries that deal with the same topics.

The Director of the Authority is appointed by the government, based upon the Prime Minister's recommendation. She is aided by a staff and an Advisory Committee, composed of members from various government offices and organizations, including representatives from women's organizations and academia. A nine-member Board is selected from the Advisory Committee to work in close cooperation with the Head of the Authority.

In the past few years, there has been a distinctive change in the tone of public discourse in Israel: in government and Parliament and in the written press and the electronic media, including news and talk shows, the debate is increasingly gender-oriented. Discussion of budget cuts in welfare and health, proposed new legislation regarding adoption, discussion of retirement age -- in these, and in many other areas, women are speaking out as women, claiming their rights, exploring gender differences, and interjecting gender-perspective and gender equality into all aspects of public and private life.

This debate is also increasing more inclusive. It is less hegemonic than in the past, and less controlled by veteran Israeli women and feminists. Israel is rapidly adopting a more multi-dimensional and multi-cultural perspective on feminism in particular and in society in general. Thus, the needs of minority women and women of color - including Bedouin women, Ethiopian immigrant women, women who immigrated to Israel from the Former Soviet Union, and others whose voice was not heard before - are participating in the debate, and making their needs, hopes, and expectations heard.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women is proactively involved in ensuring the implementation of the Law Against Sexual Harassment (see below). As part of this commitment, and in order to increase the awareness of workers regarding their rights, and employers regarding their responsibilities, we have produced and distributed flyers and booklets, in Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, and Amharic.

Knowledge, we believe, is power, and to this end, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has made great efforts to disseminate materials that will help women to understand their rights and entitlements; these efforts have included media campaigns and publication of a comprehensive Guide to Women's Rights. This guide also includes an extensive listing of all women's organizations and the services they provide.

Furthermore, as part of its pledge to advance women's power through knowledge, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women is also committed to sponsoring research and generating new knowledge about the real lives of real women. We have just completed an extensive representative survey of more than 2,000 women which will soon be analyzed and published.

Overall, we note an impressive wave of legislation. Moreover, the emerging alliance of diverse governmental actions concerning women's status, with numerous legislative achievements, points to the beginning of a heightened awareness of women's needs and the steps necessary to address them. Furthermore, the numerous women's organizations active in Israel have shown a readiness to use the justice system and appeal to Israel's High Court of Justice, which has shown itself sensitive to gender issues and willing to take a judicially activist stance.

Other organizations have taken upon themselves to lobby for legislative change, to serve as rights watchdogs, and to fill other roles so necessary to ensure that the political and legislative arenas fulfill their responsibilities to women. Taken together, these legislative advances and political activities represent an unequivocal declaration of public policy against gender discrimination and for women's equality.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women is committed to reaching each and every woman in Israel, directly or indirectly. To this end, the Authority has created numerous programs, some top-down and many bottom-up, thus creating concentric circles of informed change agents and providing them with the skills and information that they need. Below, we list just some of the examples of such programs:

Israeli law mandates the appointment of an advisor to the mayor or head of the local council in every city, town, and regional or local council. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women is actively ensuring that this law is implemented. Furthermore, the implementation of the law creates a cadre of involved, capable women; the Authority is providing these women with workshops, conferences, advice, mentoring, and direction in community projects.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women works very closely with the Unit for the Advancement and Integration of Women in the Civil Service, in order to guarantee that the principles of affirmative action, which have been articulated by the Israeli Courts and legislators, are implemented in the civil service, which is Israel's largest single employer. Furthermore, the Authority has developed and implemented a unique course for mid-level career women in the civil service, in order to develop a cohort of women who will be competent and qualified to assume leading administrative positions in the future. The Authority is running a similar course for Bezeq, the major communications company in Israel.

Another significant example of this commitment to the creation of concentric circles of influence is a course given in the twin cities of Ramle-Lod; these are mixed Jewish and Arab cities on Israel's social and geographic periphery, and this course, with the cooperation of the Jewish Agency, is geared to help the single parents women enter the workforce and take leadership roles in their communities.

Israel is a vibrant, dynamic, and rapidly changing country, with an active civil society and an assertive feminist movement. The hundreds of women's organizations and thousands of women volunteers throughout the country are testimony to the strength of civil society in Israel and the important work being done to advance the status of all women in Israel.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women marks more than

six years of operation. We note with satisfaction the wide and comprehensive legal foundation which promises women's equality. We also note the gap between these laws and the actual status of many women, including minority women, the elderly and single-parent families (mostly headed by women). We are committed to devoting our energies and our resources towards closing these gaps, through active monitoring of the implementation of the existing laws and through initiation of community-based programs that will enable women to "close the gaps" between the rights granted by law and their actual situation.

We are currently in the process of an in-depth strategic assessment to plan our future activities; towards this end, during the 2004-2005 year, the Authority has already taken upon itself to train more than 1,000 community leaders and provide them with the skills and information they need to promote gender equality.

To date, more than 2,500 men and women have participated in workshops for decision-makers and other influential members of the public. Hundreds of such conferences have been held throughout the country for women within their communities; these courses have been tailored to the specific needs of each community, reflecting the commitment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women to reach each and every woman, according to her cultural and socio-economic background.

As in the past, we are committed to continuing our intensive cooperation with the many women's groups that work together with the government ministries. We are very proud of this unique system of cooperation: while respecting each group's autonomy and goals, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women serves as a clearing house, a convener, an enabler, and a coordinator for these many feminist groups.

As we complete this report, we sense the opportunity for peace in our region, after four years of intensive conflict that has brought pain, death, and destruction to both Palestinians and Israelis. We hope that we have entered a new era of peace, which will allow Israel and all the nations in our region to devote our energies to advancing the status of women, furthering equality and wellbeing for all of our citizens

WOMEN AND POVERTY

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform of Action

- * Review, adopt, and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.
- * Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources.
- * Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.
- * Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Israel is currently undergoing a process of rapid privatization and adjustment to the globalized world economy. In the past year, "workfare" (popularly known as "Wisconsin"-like) programs have entailed serious cutbacks in what had become an unwieldy system of transfer and welfare payments. At least in the short term, these cutbacks created a particularly difficult situation for women, and in particular, for working single mothers, whose benefits were cut drastically.

In the summer of 2003, the proposed cutbacks led to a massive protest by single mothers, some of whom walked and trekked as much as 200 miles to Jerusalem to demonstrate outside the Finance Minister's Offices. The protest received extensive - and nearly universally sympathetic -- media coverage; almost all of the NGO's and activists' groups, including some of the most mainstream and even more conservatively-oriented women's groups, supported the protesters. Some of these groups organized spontaneously to provide logistical support, food and water, child care, and so forth.

The demonstration did, in fact, lead to some changes in policy and to programs which we detail below. More significantly for the long-term, the protest spearheaded a debate in Israeli society and brought gender issues to the fore.

In preparation for the introduction of the workfare programs, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has sponsored numerous courses and workshops (see below) to empower women to enter the workforce.

The National Insurance Institute. The National Insurance Institute (NII) is the statutory group responsible for administration of the National Insurance law and other legislation which deals with income maintenance in Israel. These include, for example, allotments to mothers after giving birth, alimony paid by the NII in lieu of dead-beat dads, and income maintenance guarantees.

In recent years, the law has been changed so that women who did not work out

of their homes are still able to receive old age pensions from the age of 65; if they are unmarried or divorced, they are entitled to the pension from the age of 60.

Women with physical disabilities also receive benefits specific under the law, and a housewife who has not worked outside of her home is entitled to disability benefits which are similar (although still not equal) to those paid to a woman who has been employed outside of her home.

In addition, single-parent families, the overwhelming majority of which are headed by women, are entitled to income maintenance benefits, although these have been significantly reduced in the past two years, as noted above, as workfare programs are introduced into Israel.

The NII also sponsors a number of unique and innovative training and empowerment programs; these are conducted as pilot programs and then, if they are successful, the NII encourages and facilitates their implementation on a broader basis. Many of these programs are geared towards specifically vulnerable groups in Israeli society, including Bedouin and Arab women, ultra-Orthodox women, and new immigrants. Such programs include, for example, “empowerment clubs” which operate out of women’s homes, so that the women are able to attend without crossing traditional norms and to leave the spheres of their own homes gradually.

There are also specific projects geared towards single women and young girls in the Arab and Bedouin sectors, as well as empowerment and occupational training programs for religious and ultra-Orthodox single mothers.

Gender Perspectives. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, as well as several social rights and feminist NGOs have reviewed the national budget and the budget of specific ministries from a gender perspective. We are committed to incorporating a gender perspective into government policies and programs

Training and Retraining. Numerous programs for vocational training and retraining have been established by the ministries and by women’s NGOs. Similarly, NGOs have been involved in training women for employment. The Israel Women’s Network, together with the Joint Distribution Committee, the Ministry of Welfare, and the Ministry of Absorption are engaged in a project which aims to encourage Ethiopian immigrant women to find work outside the home. The participants take courses to help prepare them for the labor market, including workshops on interviewing, employer expectations, employee rights, and other necessary skills; the course also allows for open discussion regarding the effect of the women’s entry into the job market on their personal and family life. In the past two years, the course has been conducted in seven locations throughout the country.

Several women's NGOs are involved in developing women's cottage industries in development regions, encouraging unemployed women to utilize their traditional, socialized skills for economic advancement. In the Negev, for example, Bedouin women, supported by a local feminist NGO, have set up a carpet-weaving factory. In several geographically peripheral areas, women are developing catering enterprises. These NGOs are providing women with the business planning and marketing skills necessary to ensure that these efforts will be both personally and collectively empowering and financially viable.

EDUCATION AND THE TRAINING OF WOMEN

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Ensure equal access to education
- * Eradicate illiteracy among women
- * Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education.
- * Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms
- * Promote life-long education and training for girls and women

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Two sets of legislation have contributed to ensuring that women in Israel will receive adequate education: the determination of age seventeen as the minimum age for marriage of girls; and legislation mandating compulsory education for girls and boys until age 16. Thus, over-all levels of illiteracy and semi-literacy in Israel today are very low, even among minority populations, and they are drastically lower than levels in the neighboring countries.

The Ministry of Education has established a special unit dedicated to promotion of gender equality. The Ministry maintains an active, attractive, and user-friendly website which not only provides information about the Ministry's programs and projects, but additionally provides visitors with perspectives on the meaning of gender equality and women's empowerment. The language of the website and of directives issued by the Ministry of Education reveal a clear commitment to gender equality and provide definitive guidelines for teachers and all school officials.

The current Minister of Education is a woman and an avid and committed feminist. She has repeatedly and explicitly declared that gender equality is not merely a "program" or a "project"; rather, it is a life-style. To these ends, all schools are instructed and expected to create and maintain an educational climate that is conducive to equality and mutual respect.

The Ministry of Education offers numerous In-Service Training programs for teachers to increase their awareness and skills to promote gender equality. Nation-wide programs such as Teenage Girls Go for Change empower high school students, while the school curriculum formally addresses issues such as gender, government, and politics. Most recently, the Ministry has instituted a matriculation program in gender studies.

The Ministry has made a particular commitment to promoting talented girls and

women with exceptional aptitudes in math and science. These programs, some of which include significant awards and scholarships, especially at the college and university level, are based on concepts of gender equality, allowing each child to pursue his or her innate talents and inclinations, without deference to social pressures and inflexible gender expectations.

The Israeli schools system is made up of various types of schools, including State, State-religious and ultra-orthodox schools. Within the State religious schools, a gradual change is taking place in relation to the educational programs dealing, as a whole, with the issues of sex-education, gender equality and the advancement of women.

Examinations of pedagogic practice and materials have revealed numerous instances of gender bias. These are the target of several innovative and comprehensive programs initiated and implemented by the Ministry of Education, including a full review of all Ministry-approved textbooks to eliminate textbooks that reinforce gender stereotypes and inequality. The Ministry also sponsors numerous In-Service Training programs for teachers, principals, and other education professionals. Furthermore, the Ministry has prepared a text and guide for teachers regarding gender equality in education, which has been distributed to all schools in the country.

Active, feminist NGO's, such as the Israel Women's Network, WIZO, and Na'amat, sponsor literacy and training programs for excluded and marginalized women, and also for single-parent mothers and their families.

Sports. In Israel, sports come under the province of the Ministry of Education and Culture. This, we aver, indicates the value the state attaches to sports, and especially to women's sports.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, together with the Minister, has designed a unique course for women to train them to become active and committed members of local and national Councils for the Advancement and Administration of Sports in Israel.

In the years 2003-2004, several women's sports NGO's, encouraged by the Education Ministry and the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel, initiated legislative changes that have profoundly impacted on women's and girls' sports. In response to an appeal, Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that local councils must allocate funds to women's sports to a level of 150 percent of the budget allocated to men's sports, in order to use affirmative action to redress long-standing inequality.

Similarly, the public committee that determines the criteria for allocation of public funding for sports has recommended application of affirmative action plans, and has instituted programs to implement them.

The Association for the Advancement of Women's Sports, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport has prepared a booklet detailing an ethical code to prevent sexual harassment and violence against women in sports, which is being distributed among players, coaches, schools, colleges, and parents. A series of preventative workshops to foster gender equality and respect is also being planned.

Higher Education. The proportion of women among all students has been rising steadily, and reached nearly 60% in the year 2000. Among minorities, and especially among Moslems, more men than women receive higher education; nevertheless, a significant increase in non-Jewish women's entry into higher education has gradually been occurring.

We note with great satisfaction the increasing numbers of women who are attending higher education in the Bedouin sector. Furthermore, many Bedouin women are studying non-traditional fields, such as medicine and engineering. This is particularly impressive since the greater part of Bedouin society still upholds traditional norms.

Overall, we note that women are entering non-traditional professions, and the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women is ensuring that the introduction of women into these professions will not lead to a feminization that will lead to devaluation and lower-salaries.

The number of women in senior academic staff positions is growing, albeit slowly. The Forum for the Advancement of Women in Academia, representing women from all seven Israeli research universities and several BA degree-granting colleges, was formed in the year 2000. The Forum works closely with the National Council for Higher Education and with the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Science, Culture, and Sport. The goal of the Forum is to place gender equality in institutions of higher education on the public agenda, and to bring about increased recruitment of women to the academic staff and their promotion to professorial rank.

Another initiative to improve the situation is the establishment of the Israel Association for Feminist Studies, which seeks to advance gender and feminist research and studies in Israel and to create a support network for women engaged in these fields within Israeli academia.

Women in Science and Technology. The National Council for the Promotion of Women in Science and Technology was established in the year 2000. The aims of the council are to serve as a network linking adult and adolescent women in science and technology; to serve as a contact point for problems related to women's role in science; to collect information regarding programs promoting women's role in science; to propose and implement programs which will promote

women in science; to raise public awareness regarding the state of women in science; to coordinate between public and private initiatives for the advancement of women's involvement in science.

Thanks to lobbying by the Authority for the Advancement of Women and other relevant women's groups, a ministerial committee has recently determined that this National Council for the Promotion of Women in Science and Technology will be recognized as a permanent, statutory council.

According to its most recent report, the Council has identified two major, inter-related problems concerning women in science and technology in Israel: the limited number of women involved in industrial R&D and hi-tech activity; and the difficulties facing women scientists and engineers in their attempts to advance to higher positions in the workplace (particularly in industry and in the academic sector).

Since its establishment, the Council has met monthly. The Council has already taken concrete steps towards the realization of its goals, including establishment of a forum in which women from different fields of science and technology can meet and network; and sponsorship of a conference on "Women and Science", aimed at raising public awareness regarding the relevant issues.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable, and quality health care, information, and related services.
- * Strengthen preventive programs that promote women's health.
- * Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.
- * Promote research and disseminate information on women's health.
- * Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Israel's National Health Law ensures health insurance based on progressive payments to all Israeli citizens. Coverage is comprehensive and inclusive, and includes, for example, pregnancy and childbirth, termination of pregnancy (under stipulated conditions - see below); chronic mental and physical disabilities, and acute and chronic hospitalization and treatment. The basket of health services offers a growing number of medications, including remedies for numerous gender-specific problems. The Patient's Rights Law, passed in 1996, guarantees patients their rights to autonomy, dignity, privacy, and confidentiality; makes it mandatory to disclose all relevant information; and empowers a woman to participate in informed decision making regarding her life and well-being. Health care services reach all areas of the country.

Five years ago, the State of Israel established the National Council for Women's Health. This Council, which is equal to all of the other national councils, such as the council for cardiology, oncology, ob-gyn, etc., means that the state recognizes women's health as a full medical profession.

The Council has contributed to increasing awareness by sponsoring workshops, public information campaigns, conferences, and so forth, for medical professionals, the military, lay leaders, advisors to the mayors and heads of local councils (see below), advisors on the status of women in the government ministries, and other target audiences.

The Council has also targeted specific medical topics, including mammography, violence against women, cardiac health, and mental illness among women. Furthermore, the Council has taken an active role in determining the medications included in the basket of services and medications provided under the health law, so that women receive optimal medical treatment for gender-specific illnesses.

Inoculations against nearly fifty diseases are covered by the national health insurance and administered almost universally. All drugs distributed by pharmacies and physicians in Israel have passed standard testing procedures.

The Ministry of Health maintains a network of family health clinics. These clinics are also distributed throughout the country, providing services to all sectors of the population. They offer obstetrics and pre-natal care, family planning, vaccinations, and post-natal care. The services are provided to every woman and child, including female migrant workers, whether they are in Israel legally or illegally.

Advertising of tobacco is restricted, and there are numerous publicly and privately funded campaigns and programs against smoking and alcohol abuse.

Israel has ratified most international treaties on the rights of women and girls to health care.

Israeli women use health services, visit doctors, and are hospitalized more frequently than men. However the voice of Israeli women as consumers is only slowly beginning to be heard. Medical research, training, and practice have been guided by a male model, with little attention given to gender differences associated with illness and health, life-styles, and a host of factors that appear to make women more vulnerable than men to illness.

We are aware that the advancement of women's health requires attention to both the quality of women's lives and to prevention activities, as well as to treatment of illness. To this end, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has sponsored several full-day conferences and workshops to raise public awareness regarding women's health and to give the Advisors on the Status of Women, at all levels (see below) the tools to develop programs that could further the health of the women under their responsibility.

One such conference, held in conjunction with the Association Against Cancer and attended by some 100 local council advisors, provided up-to-date information on women's health and provided tools for better care. A second conference, held in conjunction with the Association for Research on Women's Health in the University of Be'er Sheva of the Negev and attended by hundreds of medical and professionals and para-professionals, students, and interested lay people, dealt with issues related to women's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Ob-gyn. Obstetrical and gynecological services are available and covered by the National Health Law. There is no restriction of access to contraception; however the costs of contraceptives are not covered by the National Health Insurance Law and they are only partly subsidized by some of the Health Funds.

Several prominent NGO's work for the promotion of family planning and maintain information and counseling centers; several centers serve adolescents

exclusively. The Israel Defense Forces do provide contraceptive education as well as contraceptives to both male and female soldiers.

Assisted Reproduction. Israel has one of the highest ratios of assisted reproduction facilities per population in the world. In keeping with Israel's strong pro-natalist policy, the costs of in-vitro fertilization are at present entirely covered by the National Health Insurance Law, up to and including the birth of two children for married couples. Furthermore, the law prohibits employers from dismissing women or men who undergo fertility treatments, as this would be considered discrimination of the basis of parenthood. The right to motherhood is considered a basic value in Israeli society; as a result, Israel has also legislated and regulated the issue of surrogacy.

Abortion. Although abortion is illegal, the law stipulates that a hospital committee, convened at a woman's request, may approve termination of a pregnancy under specified circumstances, which include the woman's age (under 17 or over 40); jeopardy to the life or welfare of the woman; a pregnancy that results from rape, incest, or extra-marital relations; and serious congenital defects in the fetus. Thus, for all practical purposes, legal and medically-safe abortion is available to almost all women; the above-described committees exists at almost all hospitals in Israel. The woman is entitled to make the decision to terminate a pregnancy, and she need not consult with, nor does she need the consent of, any one else. Minors do not need the consent of a guardian. With regard to jeopardy to life or welfare of the mother, empirical evidence shows that the authorities are cognizant of the psychological damage which can ensure as a result of forcing a woman to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term.

Post-Partum Depression. As is well-known, post-partum depression is a difficulty which has been under-recognized and under-researched. Thanks to initiative by the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, this topic has gained increasing awareness in Israel and is currently the subject of numerous research activities. Moreover, treatment for post-partum depression is now offered at the outpatient departments of the hospitals (and not in mental-health facilities), thus encouraging women to turn for help and decreasing the stigma attached to receiving it.

Public Activities. Strong prominent NGO's are now actively promoting women's health. They regularly issue newsletters and information sheets in a variety of languages for women and girls, and conduct workshops and one-day conferences for women in government ministries.

Hadassah-Israel, for example, targeted two major medical problems facing women: breast cancer and heart diseases. The "One Woman to Another" outreach program for awareness and early detection among Hadassah's own members and general population, found that there were underserved populations of women in society, especially new immigrants and other minority groups, who had special

needs. This led to the development of a breast workshop program developed especially for those women who, for various reasons, could not access the care available in the system.

Since, as in other developed countries, heart disease is the leading cause of death for Israeli women, Hadassah has made it a goal to educate the population about heart disease and prevention through lifestyle changes, screening, and risk reduction management.

A program to supplement professional care was developed by Hadassah-Israel, partnering individual members with women receiving treatment for AIDS and HIV. This program seeks to help counter the isolation and desolation these women experience by providing support on a regular basis and interacting on a personal, non-medical level with the patient.

The Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland have partnered together to create an innovative program, ISHAH -- Israel Health Advancement for Women in Israel. This unique and innovative program will serve as a dynamic model for change, intended to cope with the challenge of advancing women's health in Israel and to emphasize the need to develop better, and more culturally-sensitive, medical services. This international, multi-organizational program trains doctors and other medical professionals, together with community leaders, health advocates, and academic researchers. The program includes training abroad, joint conferences for the American and Israeli professionals in Israel and in the United States, public conferences, leadership development workshops, etc.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women
- * Study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures
- * Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

In the past decade, Israel had made tremendous progress in public awareness of, and legislation pertaining to, violence against women. Today, Israeli women benefit from comprehensive, progressive, feminist legislation and social discourse. At least two men's organizations, Men Against Violence Against Women and New Manhood, are proof of the trend towards greater gender equality and freedom, for both men and women.

The Family Court Law (1995) concentrates all civil family issues on a one family/one judge basis, and the judges are especially trained for this position. Family Courts deal with all civil family issues, such as custody, visitation, child support, financial contracts and settlements, etc. However, the religious courts (Jewish and Moslem, as well as other religious denominations) handle all matters of marriage and divorce exclusively, according to law.

The inclusion of Family Court Services within the Family Courts is a major innovation in this new legal system. Their mission is to incorporate the psychosocial dimension into the judicial process and to assist disputing families to minimize the damages of litigation on all members of the family. FCS's are interdisciplinary units, staffed primarily by social workers. FCS expedites litigation and thus tends to lessen violence against women. According to law, FCS's are to be established alongside each Family Court. They are part of both the Services for the Welfare of individuals and Families at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and the general court system.

Prevalence and Incidence. As in most countries, precise statistics regarding the extent of violence against women are difficult to obtain, since many instances go unreported and victims generally hesitate before turning to the police or even to other treatment services.

According to a survey conducted by the JDC-Brookdale Institute, completed in 2000, based on self-reporting within a nationally representative of adult women (over 22 years old) regardless of whether they had turned to official authorities or any help services, 2% of adult women in Israel had, at some time in their

lives, been victims of rape; 4% had been victims of sexual violence; and 8% had been, or were currently, victims of physical violence. However, the researchers qualify their findings, warning that their estimations are minimal. Significantly, only one third of the rape victims and the sexual violence victims, and less than half of the victims of sexual violence, had ever sought some kind of medical aid.

The same survey reveals that approximately 11% of Israeli women have been victims of violence at least once by their spouse, and approximately 4% of the population had been victims of violence during the year prior to the survey. Among those who had been victims in the past year, 19% reported that the violent incidents occurred every day or several times a week, 42% reported occurrences several times a month, 14% reported several times a year, and 25% reported less frequent occurrences.

The data further reveal that while a significant rate of violence was found among all sectors of society, it was higher among those with lower educational levels. The rate of victims of spousal abuse was particularly high among divorcees (52%) as compared to 11% among widows, 8% among married women, and 5% among single women. The researchers suggest that the figures relating to married women may reflect under-reporting, since the survey was conducted through telephone interviews, which may have taken place in the presence of family members, including the violent spouse.

Finally, although the survey did not examine other demographic variables, welfare authorities and others involved in treatment services have previously indicated the higher levels of domestic violence among immigrants, both from Ethiopian and from the former USSR, tragically reflected in a disproportionately high rate of women murdered by the spouses in these social groups.

We do note an increase in the number of reported incidents of abuse; we believe that this can be attributed to greater awareness on the part of women, an increase in their trust in the system, and a growing empowerment that brings them to refuse to take the violence any longer.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel is mandated by law to combat violence against women. In addition to the above-listed activities, sponsored and co-sponsored by the Authority, the Authority has engaged in extensive awareness-campaigns, including television and radio ads, conferences, workshops, etc. Many of these were specifically designed for opinion- and decision-makers. More than 40,000 individuals have already participated in the more than 200 such conferences that the Authority has sponsored.

In recognition of the International Day to Combat Violence Against Women, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has prepared a booklet listing all of the services available to women, at the local, regional, and national

levels, including hotlines, phone numbers, application procedures (where needed), etc; 50,000 copies of these booklets have been issued in Hebrew, 20,000 in Russian (in conjunction with the Immigration and Absorption Ministry) and 20,000 in Arabic.

The Authority also published a poster encouraging women and girls to turn to the authorities and women's services if they are in danger or experiencing any kind of physical or verbal abuse. The headline of the poster reads, "No one has the right to hurt you".

In collaboration with the Education Ministry, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel has prepared a series of lessons for new immigrants, to be taught as part of the courses they receive when they first come to the country, regarding women's rights and the services offered to uphold those rights, especially with regard to violence against women.

To attract attention to the topic of violence against women, the Ministry of Welfare opened a one-day hotline from the offices of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women; the hotline was operated by members of parliament and ministers, from different political parties, drawing attention to the fact that the struggle against violence against women belongs to all social classes, across the entire political spectrum.

Also to draw attention to this topic, the International Day Against Violence Against Women was concluded in the shelter for battered women in Jerusalem, attended by the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, together with the Minister of Welfare and the Mayor of Jerusalem.

The Authority has sponsored some thirty conferences in government ministries, in conjunction with the Representative responsible for the status of women in their ministry. Many of these took place in hospitals, immigrant absorption centers, religious courts, and the internal revenue service. Some 50 conferences took place in the local councils, 12 more for new immigrants, several for Arab women and professionals working in the Arab sector, including a special workshop at a teachers' college, held in conjunction with the Supreme Moslem religious authorities; and 16 were conducted for medical and para-medical personnel.

In cooperation with the Immigrant Absorption Committee, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women provides workshops for new immigrants, especially for those from countries where wife-abuse may have been more normatively tolerated, to inform women of their rights and of the services available to them.

Six such conferences took place among male and female soldiers, and others among youth movement members and leaders. In conjunction with the advisors in the local councils and leading women's organizations, consciousness-raising and informative conferences were held among youth, and particular attention

was paid to teenage girls.

A unique conference, relating to the effects of violence in media on male watchers was held, in conjunction with the public commission on cable television, and with the participation of media specialists, programmers, reporters, and producers.

New legislative developments provide economic aid to battered women. An amendment to the Employment of Women Law prohibits an employer from firing a woman who misses work because she is hiding in a shelter, up to a maximum period of six months and during the 30 days following her return to work, provided her stay was approved by the welfare authorities and the employer was notified accordingly. During that time period she is to receive a social security benefit instead of a salary from her employer. Furthermore, if a woman quits her job as a result of her stay in the shelter, her resignation is to be regarded as dismissal and she will therefore be eligible for workers' dismissal compensations. The second legislative initiative is the 2001 amendment of the Single Parent Families Law - 1992, which added women who stay more than 90 days in a battered women's shelter and have instituted divorce proceedings to the definition of single parent, thus making them eligible for welfare benefits. This is an important step in freeing battered women from economic dependency on their spouses.

Services. Throughout Israel, there are 60 centers for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence (in comparison to the 53 centers that existed in 2003). The Centers are jointly funded and administered by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, women's organizations, and the local authorities. They provide direct treatment, visiting centers where parents and children who have been separated can meet (under supervision, if necessary), legal advice, and research and information.

Seven thousand five hundred individuals have been treated by the centers, of these, 5,000 were women, 2,000 were men, and 500 were children (who were offered group treatment geared to children who have been witness to domestic violence.) These 60 centers include two centers that specifically treat the needs of the ultra-Orthodox population; 14 centers for the Arab population; two centers for the Druze sector; and one center for the Bedouin sector.

During 2003, these centers conducted some 320 groups, which including parenting groups, art- and music-therapy groups, and groups for violent men.

In ten of these centers, a special project places social workers in the police stations. These social workers are available on call to speak with victims of violence and often with the perpetrator as well, close to the time of the attack and the complaint; these intakes are intended to evaluate the level of danger and to enlist the involved parties in a therapeutic process.

There are fourteen shelters for battered women, located throughout the country (compared to only 6 shelters in 1993). These shelters operate in cooperation and conjunction with non-profit women's groups, such as Na'amot, WIZO, Woman to Woman, Maslan, and others. During 2004, more than 600 women stayed in the shelters from periods of time ranging from four to six months. Some 950 children stayed in the shelters and benefited from a special program to meet their social, emotional, and educational needs.

Due to their particular cultural and religious needs, two of these shelters are intended for Arab women, and one for ultra-Orthodox women. Two of the shelters are completely accessible to women with physical limitations.

There are 18 transitional apartments, housing 53 women and 90 children, to provide women with additional options when they are ready to leave the shelters.

In addition, there are four crisis apartments, to take in women for brief emergency stays.

There is also one shelter for men who batter or beat their wives, where they receive individual and group treatment as well as consciousness-raising and behavior modification opportunities.

Nearly a dozen hotlines are devoted to violence against women, in Arabic, Russian, Amharic, and English as well as Hebrew. Police receive special training for working with victims of violence against women. For several years, police policy has dictated that violence against spouses be treated as a violent crime and that the victim be protected. Furthermore, in cases of domestic violence, the police may continue to investigate a complaint of violence even if the woman withdraws the complaint and the police have the prerogative of filing a report even if the abused woman declines to do so. Women's organizations report that cooperation with the police is generally effective and is improving.

Additional training programs, initiated and implemented by feminist NGO's, work with judges, emergency room staff, medical clinics, teachers and principals, and other social agencies.

Mandated by Israeli law in 2001, the parole boards of Israeli prisons are not allowed to parole a prisoner who is servicing a sentence for violent or sexual offences against his family, unless a professional team, which includes representatives of the Welfare Ministry and of the Prison Service, has provided an assessment regarding the extent to which the convicted felon is still considered dangerous, including to his previous victims and family members. Accordingly, committees that deal with domestic violence and incest meet on a regular basis; the committees are empowered to recommend, for example, parole on condition that the convicted perpetrator becomes involved in therapy, etc. During 2004, these committees conducted 450 deliberations with regard to incest and 1830 with regard to domestic violence.

The Prison Service also offers therapeutic and rehabilitation services and programs to men who are serving sentences after being convicted of violence against their partners and/or children, including group and individual therapy, Gestalt, art, music, and other forms of creative therapy.

There are 11 rape crisis centers throughout the country, providing emotional support, advice, and victim support services. They are staffed by volunteers. In 2003, 7,174 individuals contacted and/or visited these centers;

Israel has developed a unique model of multi-disciplinary centers which provide interrelated services to women who have suffered abuse and violence. These centers combine psycho-social and psychological treatment with medical and legal services. Two such centers exist in Israel today.

Sexual harassment. Israel's Law Against Sexual Harassment is one of the most comprehensive and progressive laws of its kind in the world. The law provides a broad definition of sexual harassment and makes such behavior both a criminal and a civil offense. The law applies not only to the civilian labor market, but also to the military, police, and all institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, it relates to co-workers as well as employers.

Holding the employer responsible for instructing the workers in avoiding harassing behavior has expanded the definition of harassment. Furthermore, the employer must establish procedures for submitting complaints and is required to deal with all complaints effectively. Regulations are defined for situations where women are more likely to be exploited or sexually harassed.

As the sponsors of the bill had hoped, the law has also served as a springboard to begin the process of discussion and awareness of gender equality among both men and women. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, together with women's organizations, is conducting extensive educational campaigns. As an example to the extent to which the norms against sexual harassment have changed and proliferated throughout society, we note that the Ministry of Transportation has developed a policy to combat sexual harassment on public transportation.

In 2002, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women commissioned a survey of awareness of and attitudes towards the law against sexual harassment. This survey, which revealed differences between men and women's attitudes, between the public and the private sectors, and between different groups in Israeli society, has served as the basis for many programs conducted by the Authority, the Civil Service, and the numerous non-governmental agencies, to which the Authority has made the report available.

The Civil Service. The Civil Service is Israel's largest single employer of women. The Department for the Advancement of Women within the Civil Service has been involved in the prevention of sexual harassment on several

levels, including dissemination of information and explanation of the Law to nearly 50,000 workers, and provision of tools to the supervisors on the status of women so that they will be able to handle workers' complaints effectively. These complaints are handled in cooperation with the Unit for Discipline and the Investigations Department within the Civil Services Administration. Women who submit complaints of sexual harassment to the Department are provided with legal advice and are accompanied and supported throughout the investigative process and the trial.

The Department has held a wide range of activities on the subject of domestic violence and violence against women, including information and counseling sessions which drew as many as 13,000 male and female workers and employees. Several well-publicized cases of sexual harassment have generated tremendous public debate and contributed to a change in legal and social norms. In all of these cases, the Court's attitude has been very firm in condemning the men's behavior and has used particularly strong rhetoric in denunciation of sexual harassment, clearly acknowledging its role in settling the standards for changing behavior in light of the changing social and legal norms. The court's emphasis on sexual harassment as an offense against the woman's dignity and liberty is clear.

Rape and Sexual Assault. In June, 2001, the actual definition of rape in the penal code was amended, leaving only the requirement that the penetration of a woman's sexual organ be done without her free consent, thus removing additional aspects that may have been used by defendants to weaken a woman's claim and in light of recent case law that had already interpreted penetration itself as constitution "the use of force".

The Israeli Sexual Assault Victims' Help Centers Union, established in 1990, currently operates thirteen centers, distributed throughout the country, including one that is specifically geared to serving ultra-Orthodox women and two that are specifically geared towards serving Arab women. The Help Centers Union's annual reports show a consistent increase in women's appeals for help, which is conventionally explained as a combination of an increasing level of violence against women and a growing awareness on the part of women.

Stalking. The Stalking Bill - 2001, drafted by a feminist NGO, represents yet another victory in the battle against violence against women. The purpose of the legislation is to protect a person from a violation of his peace of mind, privacy, liberty, or body by another person. Stalking is defined as harassing another person in any way or threatening another person under circumstances which provide a reasonable basis to assume that the harasser or threatened may return and violate [the victim's] peace of mind, privacy, freedom, or that he may bodily hurt him.

The provisions of the law enable a victim to obtain a 6-month restraining order

against the offender, which can be renewed for up to two years. The law relates to repeated behaviors including ambushing, surveillance, or following a person's movements or actions, or otherwise invading his privacy; threatening to hurt him or himself; written or verbal contact, or any other kind of contact; and damaging another's property, reputation, or freedom of movement.

Violence Against Women in the Military. Since the Israel Defense Forces, like militaries everywhere, is predicated on hierarchy and power, in which women play an inferior role, it is not surprising to find that the incidence of sexual harassment and abuse is high. As is detailed below, the military has taken firm and effective steps to empower women and to teach men about the implications, both social and legal, of sexual harassment.

Victims' Rights. Another recent legislation, representing a significant achievement for women's NGOs and reflecting change of attitude and policy of law enforcement agencies towards victims is the Victims of Offences Rights Law - 2001. Following extensive debate, a coalition of NGO's succeeded in convincing the legislature that a balance must be struck between the rights of the accused, the charged, and the convicted on the one hand, and the rights of the victim on the other. The law grants victims a long list of rights, with special emphasis on victims of violence and sexual offenses, including the right to protection at every stage of the criminal proceedings; the right to be notified regarding developments in the proceedings; the right to be notified of the perpetrator's arrest or release; the right to be accompanied by a companion during investigations; the right to express an opinion prior to each stage in the proceedings.

In addition, regulations have been implemented to authorize courts to order that the testimony of a complainant in a sexual offense be given in the accused's absence, whenever the court believes that the complainant or the complainant's testimony may otherwise be harmed, based on the use of closed-circuit television systems.

In conjunction with the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, the Israel Women's Network developed a Sexual Assault Victims Assistant Project. Using specially-trained social workers, the program assists assault victims and provides unique services to those victims who want or need to participate in the program. In addition to accompanying the client through all stages of the procedure, the program also provides police detectives and prosecutors with training and information about the unique sociological, medical, and psychological issues relevant to victims of sexual crimes, which can have a profound impact on the criminal process.

Feminist NGOs also conduct important projects. Hadassah-Israel, for example, sponsors a Good Friend mentoring program in which volunteers accompany battered women through the bureaucracy of the legal and social system o support

and empower them on a personal basis. Volunteers have also established clubhouses and drop in centers, chaperone parental visits, and are on call to accompany women who report attacks to the police.

In cooperation with the Authority for Promotion of the Status of Women, pilot program for supplying emergency call bottoms to women who are in danger of attach by spouses/partners who have been removed from their homes have been implemented.

Trafficking in Women. We believe that trafficking in persons is one of the cruelest and most degrading phenomena in the work today, a phenomenon that goes against the basic tenets of human dignity. Yet, today, most countries in the world experience trafficking in persons, and the State of Israel is no exception.

Israel is not a country of origin for trafficking in women, but rather a country of destination. In this regard, it should be noted that Israel is not a major destination country, and that the numbers of trafficked persons per year compared to many other countries, are relatively small. The victims are mostly adult women, trafficked for prostitution, and are for the most part from former Soviet Union Republics.

We wish to emphasize that there has been virtually no trafficking of minors to or in Israel.

This is a relatively new phenomenon in Israel. At such, it has taken some time to arrive at an understanding of the problem and its repercussions, and to marshal forces to combat it. However, now that awareness of the issue has been raised, treatment of this scourge, on all levels, has been undertaken, in terms of prevention, legislation, and enforcement.

In Israel, trafficked women are regarded as victims rather than as criminals, and emphasis has been placed on their basic human rights. In February, 2004, the State of Israel established a shelter for victims of trafficking. Priority is given to women who choose to testify against traffickers. Victims receive medical and psychosocial assistance based on models of short term intervention. Each victim also receives pocket money in order to cover her personal expenses, and is given the opportunity to receive legal aid. . Furthermore, victims residing in the shelter receive visas and work permits to work in Israel.

Shelter authorities cooperate with the victims' countries of origin in order to return them in ways which will protect them and allow them to undergo rehabilitation programs. In some cases, this entails cooperation with the governments; in others, it entails cooperation with non-governmental organizations in the countries of origin.

In the realm of prosecution, Israel has a specific law prohibiting trafficking in persons for the purpose of prostitution. This law sets a maximum penalty of 16

years imprisonment. As a matter of prosecutorial policy, victims are not prosecuted or fined for offences integral to the trafficking crime, such as illegal entry or forced documents.

A Parliamentary Inquiry Committee has been established to study the phenomenon and produce a report which will include recommendations in the realms of law enforcement, protection, and protection. This report is expected to serve as the basis for further development of the national action plan.

This Parliamentary Inquiry Committee has already initiated a law which sets minimum sentences for traffickers and accords courts jurisdiction to try traffickers who are Israeli citizens for crimes committed in another country, even if such country does not have specific anti-trafficking legislation.

Since it is well-known that corruption of public officials is one of the chief lubricants of trafficking world-wide, it is important to note that the State of Israel has extensive anti-corruption legislation which is adequately enforced. In addition, Israel has created a special department of the Ministry of Justice which investigates police crimes, including corruption, and has the authority to investigate other offenses, including trafficking.

Furthermore, the State of Israel is willing to cooperate with countries of origin and transit in order to combat trafficking, and the government attaches great importance to strengthening ties and cooperation with authorities in countries of origin and transit. Police representatives in different countries help forge these ties and increase these cooperative efforts.

A number of non-governmental organizations and social change groups have undertaken to lobby for, and protect the rights of, trafficked women; in particular, Kav L'Oved has taken upon itself to defend these women, lobby for their needs, and bring their plight to the public's consciousness. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has generated a bumper sticker describing trafficking in women as a crime against humanity.

The government also makes every effort to foster cooperation between different parts of society in order to battle trafficking, working under the assumption that the hydra-headed bane of trafficking requires a concerted effort to stamp it out. In the spirit of this viewpoint, government, non-governmental organizations, and Parliament work together in order to profit from the varied experience and expertise of each body.

WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action:

- * Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation.
- * Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.
- * Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.
- * Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- * Promote protection, assistance, and training to refugee women, other displace women in need of international protection, and internally displace women.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Indiscriminate terrorism continues to plague Israeli society, a source of fear for all. The Israeli government and NGO's have repeatedly expressed outrage and condemnations of acts of terrorism perpetrated within Israel's borders and abroad, and have called upon other nations to do the same. Because these attacks take place in cities and towns, on buses and in shopping centers, women and children are their primary targets and victims.

The military thus remains a central institution in Israeli society. Since Israel maintains near-universal conscription, military service is a right of passage and a source of legitimacy and status in adult life. However, fewer women are conscripted than men, and, by law, women are conscripted for shorter periods of time. Furthermore, roles in armed conflicts and peace negotiations are predicated on service and experience in the Israel Defense forces. Thus, the limitations of women's military service also restrict women's overall power and influence in the military and in foreign policy determination.

Yet, despite the ongoing threat to the State's existence, and to security and well-being, Israel is proud to have an active NGO peace movement that, among its other activities, actively demands involvement of more women informal and formal ("Track I") governmental peace processes and are persistent in their attempts to foster a culture of peace within Israel, especially among our youth.

In 2002, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation mandating equal opportunity and responsibility for men and women within Israel Defense Forces, and only bona fide occupational qualifications will be taken into account in assigning men and women to their positions in the armed services. This change is based on two

important principles: the commitment of the armed forces, which play a central role in Israeli society, to equality; and the recognition of women's human capital and ability to contribute. This is particularly true in the areas of technology and scientifically-based responsibilities (which will also provide conscripts with important advantages when they are discharged into civilian life).

This legislative change is an answer to and reflection of the opinion among the young women recruits themselves. According to IDF surveys of current women recruits, 78% of them believe that combat positions should be opened for women, and 70% believe that women should be allowed to serve in combat areas.

In the past decade, the IDF has made many changes to increase women's opportunity and to achieve greater gender integration within its ranks. In August, 2001, The Women's Corp was dismantled, leaving, in its stead, an advisory body to the Chief of Staff. With the exception of specific, individualized attention, women soldiers, like their male counterparts, are now subject to the commandment of units' officers for all purposes, including disciplinary and judicial matters. In subjecting female soldiers to the direct supervision of the unit officers, similar to that of the male officers, another barrier to women's full integration in the army has been removed.

Indeed, changes are noticeable at all levels and in every realm within the military, from the actual recruitment of women to the placement process, including the nature and length of service. Furthermore, the military provides female officers of all ranks with empowerment workshops and provides support networks for women who are appointed to senior military positions. It is very clear that the Israel defense forces are willing to adopt gender-related changes. Within the military, there are notable adjustments and arrangements for women's entrance into all military positions, including adjustment of the strain measurement to women's physiological capabilities, as well as the adaptation of specific military equipment (such as shoes) to women's needs.

At the same time, the military has remained sensitive to women's particular needs. A 24-hour hot line is available to female conscripts. All conscripts participate in empowerment courses with regard to sexual harassment and attack, as well as contraception and health education.

Women and Peace. In accordance with UN resolution 1325, the Knesset is now considering a bill presented to the Knesset and supported by all female parliamentarians, across the spectrum of parties. This legislation demands that in future peace talks and other major political negotiations, all negotiating teams will be comprised of at least 25% women.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions, and control over economic resources.
- * Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets, and trade.
- * Provide business services, training, and access to markets, information, and technology, particularly to low-income women.
- * Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.
- * Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.
- * Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, Israel has maintained a strong legal and social infrastructure to ensure that women would be able to integrate work and homemaking. Thus, Israel has extensive legislation that both guarantees equality for women and offers women protection for specific circumstances, such as pregnancy and maternity leave

Extensive legislation means few legal or formal limitations to women's full integration into the economy. At this time, our focus for the promotion of gender equality emphasizes enforcement and encouraging judicial activism and changing social norms.

Legislation mandating affirmative action, especially in public tenders, public directories, etc., is being implemented with increasing success. Gender perspectives, especially those focused on gender-differences, are increasingly becoming part of the regular social and political discourse regarding.

Several NGOs, most prominently Na'amat and WIZO, maintain extensive systems of day care and early childhood care centers. These centers, available at sliding-scale, pro-rated cost and subsidized by the government, play a crucial role in enabling women to participate in the workforce.

National and Local Budgets. Although gendered analysis of budgets are not mandated by law, organizations such as the Adva Center for Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel produce gendered analyses of the budget and its implications, including questions such as, how does taxation policy influence women; how does each specific provision of the budget affect women;

who will benefit from the services being offered; who will gain employment and who will be unemployed as a result of the proposed budgetary proposals, etc. In fact, upon its establishment, one of the first activities of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women was to request that the Adva Center map all of the budgetary allotments that relate directly and indirectly to women, in all of the government ministries. To our disappointment, the ministries were not forthcoming in this task, but to its credit, the Adva Center has continued to perform and issue its gendered-analysis of the budget every year.

Although these analyses, and similar impact studies have no formal standing, given the changes in public attitudes that we discussed above, and given the public support that these organizations receive from the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, it is clear that these organizations are increasingly being heard; most recently, for example, the Adva Center was invited by the Knesset to present its gendered analysis of the budget to lawmakers and policy-determiners.

Employment and Family Life. Significantly, the transition from a protective-paternalistic orientation that confines the participation in the workforce of pregnant women and women who gave birth to legislation which considers the family-unit as a whole and promotes greater involvement of fathers in child-rearing has grown in the past few years and has led to important legal provisions. Among these provisions, women now have the option to decide whether to work over-time during pregnancy, and couples may decide for themselves who will take the second half of the twelve-week, fully-paid maternity leave. At the same time, the rights of women with regard to pregnancy, child birth, and child care are regulated by laws that prohibit dismissal of a pregnant employee. Parental leave can be extended up to one year, unpaid, and taken by either parent.

All rights related to birth parents apply equally to adoptive parents. Both parents may also use their personal sick leave time to care for sick children. Legally, childcare is the obligation of both parents, and desertion is a criminal offense.

Training and Education. The Industry, Commerce, and Employment Ministry has engaged in programs to train women to become part of the workforce for many years. Until mid 1990's, mostly concentrated on low-tech, low-paying jobs. More recently, wider variety of training, including hi-tech and knowledge for jobs in high demand in the market, including webmaster, communications, as well as more traditional such as dental hygienist and hairdressing.

The Ministry has particularly developed programs to aid women who are to be included in the workforce programs, unique empowerment programs which, in addition to vocational training, these programs provide empowerment and work skills training.

Immigrant women. Women who immigrate to Israel, especially from more

traditional countries, difficulty integrating into the workforce. Several specific groups:

Women from the Caucasus regions, part of wave of immigration in the 1990's, live largely concentrated in socio-economically weaker, peripheral areas. Despite relatively high levels of education, these women have not integrated into the workforce. In response, the Ministry, together with numerous NGO's, have organized programs that provided women with skills needed to enter the workforce, based on empowerment, leadership training, to equip themselves with skills and tools to expand their potential and to take leadership positions within their community and to integrate into the workforce. These varied programs include women's workshops and clubs, tea hour drop-in centers, and employment training. Several such programs are coordinated by the American Joint Distribution Committee, the Immigration and Absorption Ministry; the Education Ministry; the Welfare Ministry; community centers, and the municipalities in which women live, as well as several private and family foundations.

A similar program exists for women who emigrated from Ethiopia. To date, more than 2,000 women have participated and more than 1,300 have already joined the workforce. This program is sponsored by the Immigration and Absorption Ministry, the Welfare Ministry, and the Israel Women's Network.

Other specifically-targeted groups include the ultra-Orthodox, Arab, Druze, Bedouin. For ultra-Orthodox women, there are programs run by Authority for Small Businesses, local authorities, and NGO's. In 2003, 650 women, of whom 150 opened small business as result of the course. In 2004, expanded to more courses in more locations. Innovative courses focus on the establishment of businesses in clothing, infant needs, flowers, and ceremonial art; or services such as cosmetology, graphics, advertising, insurance, income tax advising, event coordinators, architecture and interior design, and alternative medicine.

For Arab women: In 2003, 25 programs were sponsored for some 575 women, nearly 100 of whom have already opened their own businesses. These programs were run by the Authority for Small Businesses, local authorities, and small business advisory council.

The Joint Distribution Committee, in cooperation with local authorities, sponsored these courses. The variety of courses indicate the extent to which these programs are particularly suited for their target population; for Druze women, for example, courses offered event photography, jewelry making, and catering, while for Bedouin women, courses trained participants to be DJs for women's parties and to commercially prepare traditional herbal remedies, which are very popular in Israel.

We also note that too many women, even though they are fully integrated into

the workforce, and even though they may even be earning a good salary, are often hesitant and reticent with regard to the managing of money. In order to aid women to manage money more authoritatively and more independently, the Authority for the Status of Women in Israel has sponsored a number of courses about Women and Money.

Women and Technology. In late 2002, the State of Israel established the Council for the Advancement of Women in Science and Technology. This statutory Council is headed by a woman scientist and is composed of men and women who represent varied public and private scientific and academic areas. At the Council's initiative, all of Israel's universities and colleges have established committees to monitor women's progress.

The Council has initiated an extensive series of projects and programs to enable women and girls to advance in science and technology, including scholarships and incentives.

Women and Business. In times of increased unemployment, it is especially important to find additional avenues through which women can become integrated into the work market. Based on extensive research, we are aware that business initiatives can create viable work opportunities that suit women's needs.

In order to further women's small-business initiatives, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has established a think-tank based on representatives from all of the relevant governmental offices and non-governmental organizations; this group has been charged with mapping what is currently happening in this areas within the State of Israel; with identifying needs and gaps; and with suggesting means of operation.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women marked International Women's Day with several events to economically empower women, including a central conference for change agents, attended by nearly 100 women, to equip them with the skills they need; a tour of successful women's businesses in the southern region, focusing especially on businesses founded and managed by Ethiopian immigrant and Bedouin women. In addition, the Authority has sponsored a number of employment fairs and exhibitions and courses for new immigrants, ultra-Orthodox, and single-parent families in several locations throughout the country.

Finally, in conjunction with the University of Tel Aviv, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has developed a course, attended by some 120 women in senior management positions in the public and private sectors, who are being trained to serve as mentors for women who are just beginning their business careers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in conjunction with the Authority for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses, the Ministry of Absorption, the JDC, and

the Local Councils has established a unit to encourage women to open small and medium-sized business initiatives. Research has shown that Israeli women, and particularly minority women, have great difficulty in establishing their own businesses and being self-employed in the marketplace. It is very clear that women need a different kind of help to establish their own businesses than men do; more than men, women tend to lack managerial experience, to experience difficulties in procuring initial and on-going financing, and to form efficient networks. As a result, this special unit provides financing, information, workshops, and networking opportunities for women; in the near future, a website for women's business ventures will begin to operate.

The Authority for Small and Medium-Sized Business in Israel was established in 1994 to aid in the start-up of such businesses and to help entrepreneurs to overcome the many difficulties that they face. The Authority has, in particular, focused on women entrepreneurs, providing mentoring, research data, workshops focusing on business planning and marketing skills, networking opportunities, and preferable-term loans to women. In particular, the Authority has offered these opportunities to minority women, new immigrants, and women from the underprivileged sectors of Israeli society.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women believes that economic empowerment of women is crucial to the advancement of the status of women. To this end, the Authority has sponsored several conferences and full-day workshops to train women and encourage women to engage in business initiatives. One such conference was attended by more than 150 Advisors to the Mayors on the Status of Women and other activists in the local councils, in order to enable them to encourage the women in their localities to pursue business initiatives.

Equal Pay. Despite legislation that has mandated equal pay for equal work the wage gap between men and women for full time, year round employment persists.

In all branches of the labor market, in 1998, a female employee's average monthly income was about 61% of that of their male counterparts. This is partly explained by the issue of part-time work; however, close inspection of the data reveals a large gap in the average income per hour as well, which was 1.21 higher for men, a slight decrease from the 1.25 index in 1992-3.

The gap remains constant even when other variables are taken into consideration. Even within those occupations which are dominated by women, such as clerical work, a man's hourly income remains 30% more than that of a woman's.

Women on Kibbutz. Over the past two decades, kibbutzim in Israel have experienced tremendous difficulties and challenges, leading to wide-spread privatization. Since most women on kibbutzim, prior to these crises, worked in service or pink collar positions, they were particularly ill-equipped to adapt

to these changes. The Kibbutz Movement has created specially-designed programs to encourage women members of kibbutzim to open small businesses and cottage industries, including consulting practices, catering, interior decorating, industrial management, and more.

Women and Management. The Forum on Women Managers in Industry has conducted research among industrial companies that reveals that 45% of them do not employ women in managerial positions at all. Further research reveals that the proportion of female executives in industry has increased from 16% in 1994 to 20% in 1997. However, the growth in the rate of female executives has not been matched by equalization of their terms of employment with those of their male counterparts; Women's wages remain relatively low and only one-third of the women executives receive special benefits, compared with more than half of the male executives.

Appointments. An amendment to the Government Corporations Law has provided that women should be appropriately represented on Boards of Directors and that, until the time that such representation is achieved, ministers should strive to nominate women with suitable qualifications. Since the law was passed, women's representation on such boards has steadily increased. This is at least in part also due to litigation by feminist NGO's as well as to well-attended seminars for women board members and potential board members.

The situation is changing, both de facto and de jure. The State Service (Appointments) Law (Appropriate Representation) - 1995, introduced affirmative action into the civil service, obligating the Civil Service Commissioner to use all necessary means to achieve appropriate representation of both sexes in the civil service. A majority of civil servants are women; the Civil Service Commissioner has established a unit charged with advancing and integrating women into the Civil Service, including affirmative action policies.

Information. As part of its mandate to generate research regarding women, and as part of the strategic process the Authority is undergoing (see above), the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women sponsored a large representative survey of women's needs, focusing on the challenges women face in their struggle for equality, so as to enable the Authority to offer realistic and effective solutions in the future. The study is unique, in that the survey questions were based on information obtained from women in preliminary focus groups.

***WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING**

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structure and decision-making.
- * Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Affirmative action for women was first introduced in 1994, based on a governmental decision dating back to 1985, regarding equal representation for women. A subsequent series of parliamentary and governmental judicial and legislative decisions has expanded the intent of the law, so that it applies to all the public sector, including directorates of public companies. Furthermore, these provisions clearly stipulate that active searching for suitable candidates is mandatory.

As noted above, the Civil Service maintains a department for the advancement and integration of women in the civil service, which is Israel's largest employer. This unit, charged specifically with dealing with issues related to women and their work, and in cooperation with the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, also conducts courses and workshops to guarantee women's advancement and integration.

Thanks to efforts of NGO's, women make up more than 35% of the members of directorates of public companies, although we note that few women act as chairwomen of these directorates. The Civil Service remains one of the main areas where women have yet to move forward at a satisfactory pace.

There are no legislative or official proscriptions on women's participation in politics or any other public-sphere activities. There are however, practical and normative obstacles. Jewish tradition accords respect to both sexes, but also clearly defines and delegates the public sphere to men and the private sphere to women. The influence of this tradition spreads well-beyond the religiously-observant community to the general society. These views also predominate in Arab society, both Christian and Islamic. And, as a result, women's participation remains low and the gaps between de jure and de facto equality have persisted.

The Authority of the Advancement of the Status of Women, as an authority, has a systematic and systemic overview of the status of women in Israel. In response to this, and in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the Authority has taken upon itself several challenges and goals for the coming years.

The Authority has taken upon itself to identify current and potential change

agents active in their community and to encourage and support their activities for the advancement of the status of women. This core group includes men and women, as well as teenage boys and girls, who have been sensitized to gender issues and become aware of their ability to play a critical role in advancing the status of women and the relationships between men and women. The Authority actively equips them with the information, knowledge, and skills they need to fulfill these roles.

In addition, the Authority is actively training a new cadre of women who will be act as additional change agents, broadening the influence of the Authority throughout society and directly into the communities.

Religious Women. We also note with great satisfaction the emergence of a vibrant religious women's movement that strives towards inclusion of women into all areas and spheres of religious life and religious community. This movement is distinctly bi-partisan and politically unaffiliated, and is yet another example of the move towards multidimensional and multicultural feminism within Israeli society.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Create or strengthen national machineries and other government bodies.
- * Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programs, and projects
- * Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

Israel's Declaration of Independence was one of the first of its kind in the world to include sex as a group classification for the purpose of equal social and political rights. The document states:

The State of Israel will maintain equal social and political rights for all citizens, irrespective of religion, race of sex.

Though lacking constitutional force, this document has been interpreted by Israeli courts in a manner that is close to a constitutional document with constitutional powers.

Israel has promoted gender equality through two Basic Laws that address human rights guarantees. The 1992 Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, explicitly provides that the human rights set out in it will be interpreted in the spirit of the principles of the Declaration of Independence. The Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation further. Taken together, these have set the foundation for the judicial review process in Israeli law, which is increasingly applied to further women's equality and advancement.

International Conventions. Israel ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1991. While CEDAW holds no formal status under internal Israeli law, its directives do function as an interpretive guide for Israeli courts and the legislature and executive branches.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women. As discussed above and in our previous reports, the establishment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has established a statutory authority, which replaced the previous narrower mechanism. The Authority is vested with

advisor powers and may suggest policies to the government designed to advance the status of women, promote gender equality, eliminate discrimination against women, and prevent domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. In addition, the Authority supervises the gender policies of the different governmental bodies.

The Authority's uniqueness among the many groups and organizations working to advance the status of women in Israel is the Authority's ability to view the status of women systematically and systemically, in the government ministries, the local authorities, public and economic bodies, and non-governmental and community-based organizations.

Despite its central role, the Authority has not in any way undermined the importance of the other establishments and institutions working for the promotion of women's rights and status. In the past, Israel's more than 100 women's political and grass roots organizations have had been uncoordinated, diffused, redundant and even unnecessarily competitive. The Authority has concentrated on coordinating and managing cooperation between all these organizations.

The Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women. The Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women was established in 1992 and granted the status of permanent Knesset Committee four years later.

Since its inception, it has continued to operate as a vital force, enhancing the advancement of the status of women. Currently, the Committee consists of 15 members, Jews and Arab, females and males, from various political parties. The committee operates several subcommittees: The sub-committee for the advancement of women in the workplace and the economy; the sub-committee for the advancement of Arab women; and the sub-committee for women's health (which is a joint sub-committee of the Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women and the Labor and Welfare Committee).

Although the number of women MK's has not grown impressively over the past few years (currently they number 17), we note with satisfaction that the average age of the women who are elected to national office is getting younger, and we hope that this indicates that the path for women into national politics is becoming easier.

Local Councils. Legislation passed in the year 2000 mandates that each council must actively promote the status of women and must appoint an Advisor on the Status of Women who will advise the mayor/head of the local council. There are approximately 200 such advisors in Israel today.

A direct subordinate of the head of the local council, the advisor will ensure ongoing communication between the head of the council and the local women's council (where such a women's council exists) and will outline policy for the advancement of the status of women within the local authority. The Advisor

will ensure that necessary resources are provided to this end, and, in order to further her role, the advisor is to be invited to all the meetings of the local council and any of its committees. Furthermore, she is to be given the opportunity to express her opinions in every subject that relates to the status of women. Each advisor is expected to present an annual report to the Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women as well as to the Local Council to which she is attached.

The law further empowers the Minister of the Interior to order local councils to follow the law's directives, and, where the local councils fail to do so, to appoint such an advisor himself.

However, this advisory position, while mandated by law, lacks funding and other forms of support. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has thus taken upon itself to support these advisors with a series of conferences, skills-training and other workshops, and active mentoring. This, of course, is also an opportunity for the Authority itself to broaden its understanding of the underlying and nation-wide issues facing women in Israel.

The most recent municipal elections did not significantly increase the number of women who head or sit on municipal councils. For those women who were elected, the Authority for the Status of Women, in conjunction with the British Embassy, the Israel Women's Network, and other organizations, sponsored a day-long workshop on career management for women, attended by more than 50 elected officials. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women also supports these advisors through a series of workshops, publications on relevant topics, on-site visits, etc.

A second conference, held at the Knesset to honor and acknowledge those women who were elected, was attended by the Chairman of the Knesset and the Chairwoman of the Knesset Committee for the Advancement of Women, was attended by more than 60 elected officials.

In order to further the status of women, and to attempt to change this situation, the Authority for the Status of Women has engaged in activities to deepen the knowledge and commitment of councilwomen to the status of women in their localities and to gradually prepare a future cadre of women who will be prepared to run for local office in the elections, scheduled for 2008, providing them with the knowledge, skills, personal and institutional empowerment, and networking that they will need to run effective campaigns.

In 2003-2004, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women sponsored two central conferences, in order to increase the number of women preparing to run for local councils. The first conference, attended by more than 200 advisors to the mayors and heads of local councils and women responsible for the status of women in the government ministries (see below), was sponsored in conjunction with the Center for Local Government; The second conference,

sponsored by more than 100 representatives from women's organizations, was sponsored in conjunction with the Council of Women's Organizations. In addition, in order to prepare them for these elections, the Authority is currently actively and deliberately encouraging these women to run for various elected positions, such as committee heads, neighborhood council chair, parents' committees, etc.

The Authority also sponsors on-going courses and workshops for the advisors to the mayors and heads of local councils. In these courses, the Authority emphasizes personal skills, inculcates values relating to gender equality, and provides the participants with academic and practical skills. As part of this course, for example, the participants are required to analyze the municipal budgets from a gender point of view, and they are provided with expert guidance and mentoring to enable them to do so.

Professional Organizations, Labor Unions, etc. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has identified several such influential groups. In order to expand the circles of influence, we have worked with these organizations, identifying key women and providing them with knowledge, consciousness-training, and leadership skills.

Government Ministries. In active cooperation with the Advisor on the Status of Women in the Civil Service, the Authority has actively promoted those women who are acting as responsible for the status of women in each governmental ministry. This support has included workshops, conferences, preparation and distribution of informational materials, and more.

Affirmative Action. The foundation for an affirmative-action policy was laid down in two court cases brought by the Israel Women's Network to the High Court of Justice in the 1990's. Together, they established an all-encompassing basic principle within the Israeli legal system of adequate representation of both women and men in public bodies as part of principles of equality.

The last few years have witnessed major developments in the area of affirmative action. An amendment to the Civil Service Law (Appointments) - 1959 expands the use of the affirmative action mechanism within the Civil Service. According to the amendment, it is obligatory to apply affirmative action to all hiring in the Civil Service, including actual appointments and non-tendered appointments.

While until recently the use of this doctrine was limited to governmental corporations and the civil service, there is a growing trend to implement affirmative action in other segments of the labor market and public life at large.

The Civil Service. The Department for the Advancement of Women within the Civil Service, established in 1996, has been active in various areas, including

the implementation within the Civil Service of legislation oriented towards the improvement of women's status, the promotion of information and counseling for women within the Civil Service, as well as the formation and professional orientation of professionals working to promote the advancement of women in the Civil Service. The Department has also served as an address for the complaints of female workers and has maintained on-going contact with all organizations dealing with women's status in furthering common objectives.

The Department has formed a steering committee to make recommendations to the Civil Service Commissioner. As a result of the committee's suggestions and efforts by the Department, section 15A of the Civil Service Law (Appointments) - 1959 have been amended and revised to better-guarantee equality for women. The Department is currently involved in a project to safeguard senior positions of women by creating a resource of information, statistic, and guidelines for cooperation with the ministries' administrators.

According to the Civil Service regulations, each Ministry and auxiliary unit must appoint a Supervisor on the Status of Women. The Department is responsible for the training and orientation of these 80 Supervisors, whose role consists of distributing relevant information as well as organizing counseling and guidance activities in a wide variety of subjects relating to the status of women. The Department has held training course as well as move than thirty sessions and conferences for these Supervisors, while providing on-going updates of relevant information and material to deal with issues relating to the status of women, in addition to biannual meetings dedicated to the purpose of regulating supervising the Supervisors' work. Apart from guiding and supervising the Supervisors, the Department is also in direct contact with female Civil Service employees through information dissemination and personal meetings.

Hotlines for Discrimination Against Women. Finally, we note that numerous feminist NGO's, including organizations such as the Israel Women's Network, WIZO, and Na'amat operate hotlines for reporting of incidents of discrimination against women. These organizations also maintain legal aid departments, offering legal aid to indigent women and representing potentially-precedent setting cases in the Israeli courts.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform of Action

- * Promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- * Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice
- * Achieve legal literacy

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

More than 100 laws relate, directly and indirectly, to the human rights and advancement of the status of women in Israel today. Taken together, they encompass nearly all aspects of women's lives, and provide an excellent legal foundation for gender equality.

Although the right to equality is not explicitly included in Israel's two basic laws (enacted in 1992). Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty; Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation, the law does assume that the basic right to human dignity is very broad and encompasses human rights not specifically enumerated, including the right to equality; this interpretation has been reinforced by a number of Supreme Court cases. Furthermore, since many jurists in Israel, and Chief Justice Barak among them, regard these basic laws as establishing a constitution and empowering the courts to exercise judicial review, courts now have the power to strike down legislation that violates the basic rights guaranteed by the two Basic Laws. These two developments - the labeling of the right to equality as a basic right and the implementation of judicial review, can be used to strike down future legislation that violates the right to gender equality.

In 1951, Israel passed the Women's Equal Rights Law; although this legislation was progressive for its time in many ways, by the new millennium, it was deeply in need of revision and reform. In 2000, the law was amended in a very progressive and feminist manner.

The law carries important normative import. It opens with an explicit declaration of its intention to ensure total gender equality and women's advancement in all areas of the state, society, the economy and the family. \ the declaration further prohibits all forms of discrimination against women, whether intentional or de facto. Furthermore, the law guarantees substantive equality, through affirmative action, and explicitly relating to equality in human dignity. The law expands the scope of institutions in which the principle of affirmative action is required by statute.

This law expressly ensures a woman's right over her body, and provides for protection from violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and trafficking, and includes a broad provision of adequate representation in public bodies and equal service in the security forces; while some of these provisions are reiterations of already existing legal norms, some are an expansion of such norms and some constitute completely new rights (such as the guarantee of a woman's right over her body, which clearly relates to the issue of reproductive freedom).

The Judiciary has made additional contributions to the development of the right to equality in general, and gender equality in particular. The principle of gender equality has been reiterated in many cases and has served for further implementation of the progressive equal rights legislation. Most significantly, the judiciary has recently set a new norm by holding that expansive affirmative action is required in public bodies' employment policies, even where there is no statutory provision to that effect.

It is also important to note that the legislative provisions of discrimination against women all apply to the private as well as the public sphere. Furthermore the requirement of fair representation for women in public institutions has been extended to the private sector through a section of the Corporate Law (1999) which mandates that one of the directors appointed as public representatives of every public corporation should be a woman, if there are no other women on the board of directors.

As we noted above, the religious courts (Jewish, Moslem, and Christian, as well as other religious denominations) handle all matters of marriage and divorce exclusively, according to law. It is important to note that issues relating to property division, child custody, and other allied issues, are handled in civilian courts, where norms of gender equality are binding.

To inform women about their rights, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel has issued a Guide to Women's Rights and Services, which includes a detailed and comprehensive list of all of the non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that contribute to the advancement of the status of Israel. This guide is written clearly and succinctly, in order to enable women to understand and take advantage of their rights, and nearly one-quarter of a million copies have already been distributed; another 100,000 copies are in print.

In addition, a Guide to Women's Employment Rights, already issued in Hebrew in 2002, is being prepared in Russian and Arabic.

Minority Women. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel is fully committed to the equality of all women in Israeli society. We believe that it is crucially important that Arab women are involved, as equals, in Israeli society, while, at the same time, we seek to pay particular attention to the specific characteristics and difficulties that these women face. To this end, the Authority has allocated a full-time position for the coordinator of projects

in the Arab sector.

To this point, we have invested significant efforts in learning about and understanding the needs of Arab women, in order to consolidate a strategic work program. The Authority has mapped out the various non-governmental organizations working in the Arab sector and established an advisory board composed of representatives of all of the governmental and most of the non-governmental groups in order to optimize the use of existing resources. This work has been done in close coordination with the advisors on the status of women in the Arab local councils.

In several instances, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women took the initiative to ensure that women advisors were, in fact, appointed in all of the Arab local councils. In the past two years, more than 20 new advisors were appointed. The Authority has applied to the governmental bodies to procure additional funding to be earmarked for projects in the Arab sector and has initiated extensive media coverage of these projects.

“Family Honor”. The Arab Association for Human rights reported that, on the average, close to ten Arab women are murdered each year in the name of what is known as “family honor”. The police treat these cases as severe murder cases; the serious concern is further reflected in case law in which the courts consistently denounce the attempt to claim “family honor” as a mitigating grounds and entirely condemn these practices. On the procedural level, courts consistently refuse to free these suspects on bail.

Arab and Other Minority Women. As part of its activities to further the rights of Arab and other minority women, the Authority for the Status of Women has conducted several workshops and conference. One such conference, attended by twenty-five advisors to the heads of Arab local councils, attended to the particular needs of each local council, in order to garner information for the strategic planning of future activities. A second conference, held in conjunction with the Organization for the Advancement of Higher Education Among Bedouin Women in the Negev (in Israel’s southern district), furthered the attempts to encourage young Bedouin women to attend college; at this conference, which was well-covered by the media, scholarships were awarded to young Bedouin students who have volunteered with younger girls to help them to advance.

WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
- * Promote a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

The mass media both reflect and create reality. In Israel, freedom of the press is legislatively guaranteed and protected.

In the past several years, the situation has begun to change, and a corps of motivated, committed, women journalists have developed. Avowedly feminist, they present women's issues as news, discuss non-traditional topics such as national security and the military, and bring a gender perspective to their analyses of events and issues. Several women now host programs in prime time, on both radio and television. Similarly, in the print media, several feminist columnists and reporters have begun to reach prominence.

These women bring women's issues to the fore and engage in feminist campaigns; for example, a group of prominent women journalists in the print and electronic media have taken upon themselves to campaign and fundraise for the Rape Crisis Centers.

In order to increase the visibility of women in the media, and to promote their authoritative position, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, together with the Council for the Advancement of Women in Science and Technology have produced an extensive and comprehensive list of women experts who can be called upon by the media; this list not only includes women who can speak about women's issues, but all women who are experts in their particular fields, and, especially, women in non-traditional areas, such as nuclear science, defense and security, economics, etc.

Several women's NGO's have established media watchdog groups to react to offensive advertising. The women receive training in media monitoring and analysis, and then are encouraged to respond to offensive material.

WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform of Action

- * Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.
- * Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programs for sustainable development.
- * Strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional, and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

The Israeli environmental movement is still developing, but it is clearly growing. Although there is no distinct eco-feminist movement, the growth of environmental awareness in the country is reflected in the increased number of NGOs established in recent years.

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel asserts that gender-sensitive environmental planning is commensurate with good planning, and we are committed to introducing it. We are further committed to a planning process that would be empowering and participatory in all stages, for all of Israel's citizens.

To date, the Council of Women's Organizations has yet to relate to questions of the environment in depth. We are hopeful that in the coming years, this will take a more prominent place in the feminist agenda.

THE GIRL CHILD

Strategic Objectives Mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action

- * Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child.
- * Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.
- * Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development, and training.
- * Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labor and protect young girls at work.
- * Eradicate violence against the girl child.
- * Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic, and political life.
- * Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child.

An Overview of the Situation in Israel Today

In Israel, the basic rights of all girl children are recognized and observed. All children (boys and girls) are legally legitimate; any female or male child born in Israel to parents residing here legally is automatically granted citizenship; all male and female children are equally entitled to inherit from their fathers, whether or not their mothers were married to the father. The government provides all families with monthly child allowances for children up to the age of 18. The legal minimum age for marriage is seventeen for women; there is no minimum for men.

Child Labor. The Juvenile Labor Law (1953) generally prohibits work for children under age 15, except under circumstances such as holidays and vacations; in these circumstances, the legislation and regulations carefully stipulate the conditions under which it is permissible to employ children.

Education. The Israeli secondary-education system is composed of both technological/vocational and general high schools. Most of the students that take their matriculation exams study in the general schools. In the 1996, 71% of the girls in 12th grade studied in the general track while only 58% of the boys in 12th grade studied in the general track.

Leadership. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of women in Israel has begun to work with the youth movements, enlisting them in the struggle against violence against women and girls, providing the youth counselors with the necessary skills to work with youth movement members to raise their awareness and to make gender equality part of the youth movements' values-orientation and educational programs.

Aware that girls will be the feminist leaders of tomorrow, several women's NGO's have implemented leadership programs for young women. The Israel Women's Network, for example has designed a project for young women in 10th grade that aims to increase their awareness about gender issues; to instill in them a sense of their own abilities and potential to take on leadership roles in all aspects of society; expose them to career possibilities in non-traditional female occupations, particularly in the sciences, technology, and politics, and to encourage them to consider these fields.

Violence Against Girls. As part of its commitment to the generation of knowledge about and for women, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women sponsored a survey on violence during courtship. The study revealed that there is a low level of awareness of the signs that predict violence against women. However, 90% of the women did say that they would not continue in a relationship that was likely to become violent (were they able to identify the signs). More than 1/3 of the respondents noted that they have friends who are involved in violent relationships; most of the violence is verbal. Seventeen to 18 per cent of the respondents have been exposed to violence during courtship. Furthermore, the study revealed that girls have a higher level of awareness of the dangers of jealousy and other forms of possessive behavior than boys do.

Social services in Israel are aware that teenage girls and young women may be in distressful situations due to their vulnerability and the pressures of adolescence. Therefore, the Service for Girls and Young Women was established to protect them and to provide psycho-social and rehabilitation services to girls at risk due to physical, sexual, verbal or emotional violence, substance abuse, and/or dysfunctional family relationships. These services are provided by specially-trained professionals.

In 2003, 17,668 young girls received individual and group treatment. There are two shelters for teenage girls in distress, overseen by the Ministry of Welfare, one for Arab teens and one for the general public. During the year 2003, 183 teens stayed in these shelters. There are 11 half-way apartments for girls who are ready to transition into the community, one solely for Arab girls. There are 50 warm homes available throughout the country, in which, during 2003, 1706 girls received day treatment, a sense of belonging, and empowerment activities. There are 97 clubhouses and groups, which provided additional services to 2117 girls and young women. An additional 75 young women participated in groups designed to provide them with relevant life-skills, high-school equivalency education, etc.

The Welfare Ministry, in collaboration with the Education Ministry, conducts workshops for students in grades ten and 11 throughout the country. These 10-session workshops include programs relating to prevention of violence and gender equality; in addition, educational advisors in the schools provide educational

programs, which, during 2004, operated in 2,200 classes.

Numerous NGO's also provide services to teenagers and young women. WIZO Israel, for example, operates several programs for young girls at risk, ages 13-15, who have the personal potential and talent to succeed. Most of these young girls are not currently receiving treatment from social service programs, but, if left unattended, their situation might deteriorate. Through a series of some 35 meetings, these girls are provided with personal and interpersonal skills, relevant information, and personal empowerment. The program operates in nearly one dozen locations throughout the country.

WIZO also operates eight warm home programs for nearly 30 vulnerable girls aged 14-18 who suffer from neglect and low self-esteem and are at risk for deteriorating into the streets. Similarly, WIZO operates drop-in centers for girls in over a dozen locations throughout the country.

For more than thirty years, WIZO has continued to sponsor a program, in conjunction with the Welfare Ministry, for girls to encourage them to enlist in the military, which will enable them to obtain vocational training, work habits, personal and social responsibility, and socio-economic mobility.

In 2003, WIZO established a program of mentoring for girls and young women who have succeeded in pulling themselves out of the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. The program is sponsored together with the University of Tel Aviv and social-change NGO's.

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