

# The Rights of Women in Israel

May 2012

## WRJ Board of Directors Statement

“So God created human beings in [the divine] image, creating [them] in the image of God, creating them male and female.” Genesis 1:27

Throughout its one hundred year history, Women of Reform Judaism has been committed to equal rights for women in North America and around the world. WRJ has not hesitated to speak out on matters of justice for women anywhere in the world, including the rights of women in the State of Israel. Sadly, at this time, another statement is needed.

Attempts to limit women’s rights in the public arena have become more and more brazen in Israel during the last year. For many years, Women of the Wall (WOW) has been fighting for the right of women to worship publicly and collectively at the Western Wall. These valiant women have accepted numerous compromises and restrictions on their rights, yet the Israeli authorities continue to tolerate their harassment, thereby defying the court decisions granting them limited access. Recently, the Israeli authorities at the Wall have escalated the dispute by arresting Anat Hoffman, the head of The Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), for the ‘offense’ of carrying a Torah scroll.

On public buses in some neighborhoods, women have been forced to enter and sit in the back of the bus in order to ‘protect’ Orthodox men from the possibility of sitting next to them. Women who failed to comply were abused and harassed, until IRAC challenged the status quo with a law suit. Armed with a ruling in their favor, the IRAC ensures that bus drivers will intervene in such situations. Though segregating public buses is against the law in Israel, ‘freedom rides’ have become necessary to ensure that women maintain their rights in public transportation.

Even walking on public sidewalks has become dangerous, as women and girls have been harassed by extremists for wearing ‘immodest’ clothes, in both secular and Orthodox neighborhoods. Many of us were outraged to read about Orthodox bullies harassing an eight year old child in Beit Shemesh, dressed in traditional Orthodox clothing, on her way to school. We find it deeply troubling that some would seek to justify spitting on little girls in the name of Jewish tradition and values.

Increasingly aggressive restrictions have been imposed in neighborhoods throughout the country. Grocery stores have gender segregated check-out lines and health clinics have separate hours for men and women, boys and girls, limiting their ability to get the health care they need.

There are those who would silence women in the public arena, denying them participation in medical conferences, military ceremonies, and even on public radio stations. WRJ will not be silent. We will raise our voices for those who cannot be heard above the bullies and extremists, or who are ignored by those who are indifferent to their cries.

WRJ is proud of our partnership with the Women’s Groups of WRJ-Israel and with our support for The Israel Religious Action Center, which is leading efforts to fight these restrictions. We have joined with other Jewish women’s groups and progressive voices to speak out on these issues and to support Israeli women their

*For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)*

struggle.

In light of current circumstances, Women of Reform Judaism reaffirms its commitment to work with others in North America and Israel, within the Reform and Progressive communities around the world, and across religious streams, to support equal rights for women in Israel. We encourage our sisterhoods to become informed about the issues facing women in Israel and to become active in efforts for gender equality. In doing so, we encourage our members to:

- Write letters about the women's right to equality in Israel;
- Lead and/or participate in demonstrations on these issues;
- Make comments on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media networks regarding companies that have chosen to remove women from their advertisements in Israel;
- Travel to Israel and arrange to participate in a WOW freedom ride;
- Support women's groups, such as WRJ-Israel; and
- Support other organizations, like the Israel Religious Action Center, that support the rights of women in Israel.

*For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)*