

ISRAEL

A law for the inclusion of women in security decision-making

Women have played key roles in peace negotiations in the Middle East, such as Palestinian peace activist and literature professor Hanan Ashrawi and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. However, women are strongly under-represented in peace talks and security decision-making. In late 2004, two members of the Knesset (Israel's Parliament), in collaboration with *Isha L'Isha*, a grassroots women's organisation sought to change this situation. They did so by initiating amendments to the 1956 *Equal Representation of Women* law to mandate the inclusion of women in teams appointed by the parliament for setting domestic, foreign or security policy, and for conducting peace negotiations.¹

Isha L'Isha organised a large-scale grassroots campaign, reaching out all of its members, as well as to other women's and peace organisations, encouraging them to call, email, and fax members of the Knesset in support of the law. A media campaign was also organised to convey a strong signal to the Knesset about the importance of this law.² After the law passed its first reading in March 2005, *Isha L'Isha* sent representatives to Knesset debates to ensure that the final draft would be as effective as possible and to help ensure that the law would pass in subsequent readings.

The amendments to the law were passed by the Knesset in July 2005. The resulting law on *Equal Representation of Women* provides for the equal rights of women and their protection from violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking, as well as for the equal representation of women in policy-making and peace negotiations. The success of the campaign has been attributed to two main processes: the creation of a coalition of women's organisations that supported the bill publicly, and the open communication and cooperation with members of the Knesset.³

The ultimate aim is that, whenever a negotiating team or committee is appointed, its makeup will be reported to the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women in the Prime Minister's Office. If the Authority believes that women are not properly represented, it can ask that this be corrected. This system, however, still has to be translated into action, which will eventually require the intervention of the judiciary.

The law fostered the participation of Israeli women in the International Women's Commission, a global coalition of 60 female activists and government officials, launched in Istanbul in July 2005. Starting from the observation that Israeli and Palestinian women are largely absent from decision-making processes and official negotiations (and strengthened by the explicit mandate contained in the 2005 law and in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325) the Commission is working on a system to support women being appointed to negotiating groups in the region. The Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations are a major focus of these efforts.

Despite Israel's progressive gender equality law, available data on gender equality suggests that women in Israel still have a long way to go before they attain true equality. As of March 2009, 21 out of 120 members (17.5 per cent) of the Knesset were women, compared to an average of 21.2 per cent among European Union countries.⁴ In Israel, paths for women into national politics include through local government and/or via the army. The integration of women into the armed forces has constituted one of the pillars of the government's strategy towards gender equality. However, while women make up 33 per cent of officers in the lower ranks, and 21 per cent of Captains and Majors, they still constitute only 3 per cent of the most senior ranks.

1 Isha L'Isha, "Parliament/Knesset Passes New Law Mandating Inclusion of Women for Peace and Security Negotiations & Policy," (Isha L'Isha News Release, July 21, 2005), <http://www.peacewomen.org/news/Israel-OPT/July05/Knesset.html> (accessed June 29, 2009).

2 Ibid.

3 Kathambi Kinoti, *Involving Israeli Women in Peace and Security* (interview with Sarai Aharoni of Isha L'Isha, Haifa Feminist Centre Israel, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Resource Net Friday File Issue 241, August 2005), <http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Involving-Israeli-Women-in-Peace-and-Security> (accessed June 29, 2009).

4 See International Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 31 May 2009." IPU, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (accessed June 29, 2009).

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It is too early to assess the impact of the 2005 amendments to the *Equal Representation of Women* law in Israel. Nevertheless, it represents a positive example of action to concretely implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Creating the new law is only the beginning of a long process that will involve training women in negotiation skills, teaching conflict resolution, creating a directory of qualified female negotiators, and monitoring the implementation of the law.⁵

⁵ Isha L'Isha, "Parliament/Knesset Passes New Law".