

Statement by  
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Permanent Representative of Israel  
To the United Nations, Geneva

Before the  
The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)  
68 Session

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Madame Chair, Distinguished Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to be here today to present Israel's 6th Periodic Report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. On behalf of the Israeli delegation, I warmly welcome this opportunity to discuss Israel's efforts to fulfill its obligations, and to share some of our achievements, experiences, views and challenges.

Israel places great importance on respect for human rights. Like other democracies, it is governed by the rule of law and has an open and dynamic society as well as a vibrant and active civil society.

Fundamental human rights protections are afforded to every individual, men and women, preserved by a series of Basic Laws and relate to all aspects of life. Israel's courts are both empowered and willing to intervene and impact public policy.

Israel's ratification of seven core UN Human Rights Conventions, and of many other HR Instruments like the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and more, reflects our country's strong commitment to the important protections established in those conventions, and to its additional monitoring mechanisms.

The advancement and promotion of gender equality and the promotion of women's rights have been on the agenda of every Israeli Government since the foundation of the State of Israel. Equality is a fundamental principle already enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, and the "Equal Rights for Women" Law, enacted

only three years after the State was founded, is a testimony to the emphasis we place on gender-related issues.

Between the years 2010 and 2014 alone, Israel passed some 50 laws and amendments to further bolster gender equality and the empowerment of women. In fact, Israel was the first country in the UN to officially recognize in its legislation the importance of the participation of women in all decision-making levels of national institutions and mechanisms. Furthermore, with the 2030 Agenda, Israel, as part of the International Community, is committed to achieve equality and leave no one behind and has taken many steps towards the realization of (SDG) Goal no.5.

Israel ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1991 and its commitment to these core values and rights has been reiterated time and again in laws and court rulings and is repeatedly re-affirmed and promoted through legislative and policy measures, in constant dialogue with civil society. Israel highly respects and values the work of this honorable Committee and gives serious consideration to its conclusions and remarks.

Since the submission of its previous periodic report, the State of Israel has taken significant steps in several fields in order to promote and better implement the convention, as appears in our report and will be addressed by my colleagues shortly.

The composition of our delegation here today, reflects the importance we attribute to the UN HR Conventions. I am pleased to present our delegation of experts from all relevant Ministries in Israel, with the ability to provide substantive responses to

the Committee's List of Issues, to be considered along with Israel's 6<sup>th</sup> periodic report.

The members of our delegation are:

**From the Ministry of Justice:**

- Ms. Emi Palmor, Director General ;
- Attorney Moriah Cohen – Bakshi, the head of Children and Family section, the Department of Counselling and Legislation ;
- Attorney Hila Tene-Gilad, Director OF Human Rights and Relations with International Organizations, The Office Of The Deputy Attorney General (International Law) ;
- Attorney Moshe Cohen, Head of press office ;
- Attorney Dafna Dror-Shpoliansky, Office of the Deputy Attorney General, (International Law) ;

**From the Israel Prison Service:**

- Dr. Kathrine Ben-Zvi, Head of Research Department ;

**From the Israel National Police:**

- Chief Superintendent Mr. Gilad Bahat, Head of Investigation Department, General headquarter ;

**From the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services:**

- Attorney Mariam Kabaha, the National Commissioner at the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission ;

**From the Ministry of Health :**

- Dr. Sagit Arbel- Alon, Director of Policy Planning Division ;

**From the Ministry of Education:**

- Ms. Oshra Lerer Shaib, Gender Equality Superior ;

**From the Israeli Defense Forces:**

- Major Yael Fefer Finarsky, Head of Palestinian affairs section at the International Law Department ;

**From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:**

- Mr. Yoel Mester – Deputy Head of Mission, Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations and international Organizations in Geneva ;
- Attorney Orit Kremer, Legal Advisor to Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations and international Organizations in Geneva ;
- Attorney Brian Frenkel, Advisor Human Rights, Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations and international Organizations in Geneva ;

Madame Chair, Distinguished Committee Members,

In recent years, as will be reflected in the dialogue today, we have experienced major progress in promoting equal representation, prevention of discrimination and empowering women.

As was also acknowledged by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, who visited Israel on September 2016, Israel is party to many core human rights instruments which constitute an important tool for the interpretation of national legislation, and serve to further enhance and entrench international human rights norms in the domestic sphere.

The Rapporteur also commended the current work towards the accession of Israel to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Such ratification would be a significant and important step in combating Violence against Women in line with that Cedaw Convention.

Following adoption of UN Security Council Res. 1325, Israel enacted a law based on principles of the resolution (Equality of Women's Rights Law, amendment No.4, 5765-2005) which mandated the inclusion of women to public bodies established by the Government on issues of national importance, including peace negotiations. Over the last seventeen years, Israel has taken an active part in promoting the six subsequent Security Council Resolutions that followed the principles originally declared in Resolution 1325. Mashav, Israel's Agency for International Development, has been actively training women from around the world to equip them with the necessary leadership skills in order for them to hold senior positions in society.

As part of Government efforts to counter violence against women, in September 2014, the Minister of Public Security and the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Services decided to establish an Inter-Ministerial committee on domestic violence. Its findings and recommendations were published in July 2016. This was also commended by the Special Rapporteur.

Another important achievement was the adoption of the new Resolution on "Preventing and Eliminating Sexual Harassment in the Workplace" at the CSW, during its last session, which was led by Israel. This resolution sends a clear message to all stakeholders: that we need, and we can, prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace.

Israel is working closely with its Civil Society and makes a concerted effort to involve civil society in the process of preparing its periodic reports to the UN Human Rights Committees. Civil Society contributions are given substantial consideration during the drafting of the Report.

Since 2012, the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs have been participating in a joint project which aims to improve cooperation between State authorities and civil society organizations, specifically relating to the reporting process to the UN Human Rights Committees. This joint project was initiated by the Minerva Center for Human Rights at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Faculty of Law.

In 2017, the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, has initiated the "Round Tables" project. The project consists of six (6) sessions, which took place in different academic institutes around Israel – South, Center and North. The sessions are a unique platform for a discourse between NGO members, academics and

representatives from the Government, on core human right issues on the following topics: LGBT Rights, Israelis of Ethiopian decent, Bedouin population, Women's rights, Rights of people with disabilities and Social and economic rights in the periphery.

Madame Chair, distinguished Committee Members,

Although we face many security challenges, Israel remains committed to Peace. We have been making many efforts to establish peace with our neighbors that culminated with the two peace accords we have signed with Egypt and Jordan. We are continuously striving to reach a historical compromise with the Palestinians that will finally bring to the fulfilment of our long desire to see two states living side by side in peace and security. In order to achieve this goal, Israelis and Palestinians need to work together and there's no doubt that. Israeli and Palestinian women have a lot to contribute in this process.

Madame Chair, distinguished Committee Members,

We are here today with a firm belief that this dialogue with your Committee provides Israel with an important instrument to further improve its mechanisms for a better implementation of human rights.

With your permission, Madame Chair, I will now pass the floor to my distinguished colleague Ms. Emi Palmor, Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Justice.

Thank you.



**Statement by**  
**Ms. Emi Palmor**  
**Director General of the Ministry of Justice**

Madam Chairperson and Distinguished Committee members,

I am Emi Palmor, Director General of the Ministry of Justice.

I am honored to appear before this distinguished Committee today in order to present Israel's sixth periodic report. We look forward to engaging in a constructive and meaningful dialogue with you.

The advancement and promotion of women's rights have been on the agenda of every Israeli Government since the foundation of the State of Israel.

Of course, the Government is not alone in its endeavors. There are a myriad of other entities that are active in the promotion of women's rights in Israel. Knesset Members are active and vocal and the court system is ready to intervene in a wide array of issues. Civil society is also very active in initiating legislation, raising awareness and assisting in the promotion of human rights, with a strong emphasis on women's rights, often providing impetus for Government action. We also have a very open, vocal and independent media.

All of these assist in strengthening the work of the Government and in raising awareness of rights and issues within the Israeli public.

Our goal is to further enhance cooperation in implementing all human rights conventions in the best possible manner. To this end, in 2017, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated a "*Round Tables*" project. This project took place in different academic institutions around Israel and provided a

unique platform for discourse between non-governmental organizations, academics and representatives of the Government on core human right issues. Round tables were dedicated to a wide range of issues, including women's rights.

In addition to the discussions and work on these issues on an ongoing basis, the effort that goes into the compilation of our periodic report, and the constructive dialogue with this distinguished Committee, provide, in and of themselves, an invaluable opportunity to conduct rigorous internal assessments. Indeed, during the compilation of our report and the preparations for this meeting, we conducted in-depth discussions on issues relevant to the Committee and debated what more could be done.

We have also established an inter-ministerial team, chaired by the Deputy Attorney General, dedicated exclusively to the review and implementation of the Concluding Observations of Human Rights Committees, including those of the present Committee, naturally.

In 2014, the Government of Israel decided on a gradual duty of gender evaluation of the State budget and for the first time, the state budget was examined through Gender analysis. By 2016, gender analysis was performed for 70% of Government Ministries.

Madam Chairperson,

It is my pleasure to be able to highlight a number of significant and far-reaching steps that the Government of Israel has taken to further advance gender equality and women's rights in Israel since our last presentation.

I am proud to have been personally involved in a number of these steps.

In the context of Israel's increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons, I was asked to head an inter-ministerial committee charged with examining the possibility of criminalizing the use of prostitution.

The *Penal Law* in Israel criminalizes acts that create the basis for the existence of prostitution (such as procurement or maintaining a brothel) but, with the notable exception of the use of child prostitution, does not criminalize the use of prostitution services. At the request of the Minister of Justice, Mrs. Ayelet Shaked, we have conducted a careful and sensitive examination into the possibility of bringing about legislative change on this matter. We have heard personal testimonies and expert opinions and have studied models adopted in other countries with the aim of strengthening the protection we offer to women from exploitation and trafficking. We are currently in the final stages of editing our concluding report. In July 2017, following the Committee's work, two private bills criminalizing the use of prostitution services, supported by Minister Shaked, were approved in preliminary readings in the Knesset.

I also head an inter-ministerial committee tasked with formulating a strategic plan to contend with the negative repercussions of polygamy, which is still common in the Muslim population, mainly in the Bedouin society, in Israel. Earlier this year, the Government reaffirmed its commitment to tackling this phenomenon, recognized the immense harm that it causes to women and children, and to society at large, and laid the foundations for the first coordinated inter-ministerial plan of action. At the request of the Government, the committee, which includes representatives of NGOs and the Bedouin population, is examining ways to increase public awareness of the harm caused by polygamy and to increase the enforcement in this field.

The committee is also considering ways in which populations prone to polygamous marriages may be empowered, decreasing the incentive and the context in which these marriages occur. For example, it is examining how employment opportunities may be made culturally and practically accessible and how educational frameworks may be enhanced and developed in order to reduce drop-out rates. The committee is also examining how welfare services may be properly channeled in order to care for the emotional and social needs of women and children who have been harmed by polygamous marriage.

Other branches of the Ministry of Justice have also taken leading roles in these efforts. The Attorney General, for example, recently published a guideline stressing that the Supreme Court rejected the "cultural defense" with regard to the offense of polygamy. The Attorney General also instructed the State Attorney's Office to request custodial sentences and stressed that a substantive age difference between the man and the woman or the existence of coercion, amongst other factors, may be considered to be aggravating circumstances.

In this vein, I would like to remind the distinguished committee that, just over a year ago, we opened a branch of the Legal Aid Administration in *Rahat*, the largest Bedouin city in the Negev, in order to serve the population in this area. We are confident that this is an important step in making the courts more accessible to Bedouin residents of the Negev and that the women of this area will gain particular benefit from the services provided.

This strength of purpose is also evident in relation to law enforcement against other crimes of gender violence. Convictions of sexual harassment, for example, have more than doubled over the past two years. A joint review team, established in 2003, continues to conduct periodic reviews of cases of femicide in order to

prevent their recurrence. An innovative and successful project, initiated by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services together with the Police, has placed a social worker in more than 25 police stations in order to strengthen cooperation and provide immediate support to victims.

We have also taken further steps to empower women who have fallen victim to sexual offenses. I am pleased to be able to inform the distinguished Committee that the Knesset has recently amended our *Legal Aid Law 5732-1972* in order to grant free legal aid to victims of grave sexual offenses. In accordance with this amendment, legal aid is to be granted to a victim once an indictment has been filed against the offender, with no financial eligibility test. This entitles victims to free legal aid during criminal proceedings, ensuring that a further barrier to full realization of their rights has been removed. This amendment is an important recognition of the particular difficulty that victims of sexual crimes may experience during the criminal proceedings, including in the submission of victim impact statements before sentencing, parole or pardon.

Israel is also examining the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the "Istanbul Convention"), a process that has entailed an in-depth examination of all efforts to combat gender-based violence.

In this context, I was pleased to be informed of a recent court ruling which is a further building block in our efforts to combat gender violence. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, the District Court of Tel Aviv-Jaffa ruled that a venue of sexual entertainment, which included live striptease shows, was operating contrary to an amended urban building scheme. **Although the area had been designated as appropriate for night-time entertainment, the Court ruled that activities that**

**violate the human dignity of a woman, including the objectification of women in general, are incompatible with the basic values underlying the building scheme.** The District Court therefore upheld the planning committee's decision to deny the establishment a special use permit. This recent ruling is a perfect example of the innovative use of tools other than criminal law in the protection of women. Over the past couple of years, the State Attorney's Office has commenced integrated enforcement operations in the context of prostitution offenses which includes civil proceedings as well.

Madame Chairperson,

We have also taken important, legislative steps that we hope will serve to further gender equality in our labor market.

Paid maternity leave has recently been extended by an additional week and now stands at 15 weeks. Additional flexibility has been added to the entitlement of fathers to paternity leave, including an amendment that enables fathers whose wives are self-employed to take parental leave in lieu of their partners. We hope that the additional flexibility will encourage fathers to exercise their right to paternity leave.

Many of the issues I have mentioned have been recently discussed by a Ministerial Committee for Social Equality, established in 2015. This Committee, chaired by the Minister of Social Equality, has been charged with promoting gender equality in various aspects of life and convenes regularly.

With regard to employment in Government Offices; In Israel, women constitute 62% of the employers in the Civil Service. In recent months, the Civil Service Commission has issued the "*Gender Equality Index*" Report, which examined a

variety of parameters of gender equality in every Ministry. The Report was sent to all Government Ministries and support units and each Ministry received comprehensive information on the salary gaps in their Ministry. In addition, the Commissioner issued a Guideline which includes criteria for setting salary components, under the assumption that higher transparency would narrow the possibility for discrimination in salaries of the same position.

Personally, I initiated a similar report which focuses on the Ministry of Justice. It is published annually and contains comprehensive information on the diversity of employment in the Ministry of Justice. According to the 2016 report, the majority of employees in the Ministry of Justice are women (68%) and they also hold the majority of high ranking positions (66%). There are virtually no wage differences between men and women in the Ministry of Justice.

This achievement is also evident in the court system where the majority of Judges today are women (51%). In 2017, two (2) women of Ethiopian descent were appointed as Judges, for the first time in the history of our judicial system.

In April, 2017, a woman was appointed for the first time to serve as a *Qadi* in a Muslim Religious Court. This is a historic development for Muslim women and for the religious courts in Israel in general.

As far as the Jewish religious courts are concerned, a landmark decision given by the High Court of Justice in August ruled that the criteria used to appoint the Director of the Rabbinical Courts must be relevant and applicable to both women and men. I, myself, served as Acting Director of the Rabbinical Courts. Recently, a woman was appointed to serve as Deputy Director of the Rabbinical Courts.

As is well known, Rabbinic Courts deal with the divorce of Jewish couples in Israel. A number of measures have recently been taken in order to further contend with husbands who show reluctance in granting a Jewish writ of divorce (Gett). For example, in 2017, the relevant Law was further amended in order to add to the administrative sanctions that may be imposed on husbands who have been imprisoned for refusing to grant a divorce.

Importantly, the State Attorney has also issued a guideline clarifying the possibility, to initiate criminal procedures against the spouse who refuses to grant divorce in certain circumstances, on the grounds that they are violating a judicial order.

Finally, I would like to address an important amendment made earlier this year to the Government regulation concerning the processing of Asylum Requests. This procedure highlights gender sensitivities that are central to the process of refugee status determination. It instructs those conducting interviews to display due sensitivity to gender-based considerations that may affect behavior, feelings or testimony of the applicant and that particular sensitivity must be displayed to victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. Interviewers must also inform applicants that they may request an interviewer and translator of the same gender.

Moreover, the amendment to the regulation stipulates, importantly, that training for employees of the Refugee Status Determination Unit must include contents relating to gender-based sensitivity, such as the psychological effects of trauma, cultural perceptions of women in the country of origin and their effect on the asylum seeker.

Madame Chairperson,



We are looking forward to a constructive and fruitful dialogue between the Committee and our delegation. We have much to present to you, far more than I have just briefly described, and we hope that the delegates, who are all high level professionals in their respective fields, will be able to present and to elaborate on the questions raised by the honorable committee members.

I would like to thank you very much for your attention. I hope that by the end of this day you will recognize the seriousness in which Israel takes its obligations under the Convention, and addresses the remarks of the Committee. Israel has spared no efforts to cooperate with the Committee and we hope that this session will provide us with the opportunity to conduct a candid and constructive dialogue with you.

Thank you.

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