



The Truth About Israel:

Israel is at the Forefront of Women's Rights

Israel is a parliamentary democracy. In 1948, The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel stipulated that the new state "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex". The Declaration includes additional guarantees of 'freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture'. Two of the original thirty-seven signers of the Declaration were women.

Since then, the State of Israel has promoted the civil rights of all its female citizens through a body of progressive legislation.

Since the 1950s, Israeli women have benefited from the Women's Employment Act that granted working women twelve weeks of paid maternity leave and established that a woman could not be dismissed from her job because of her pregnancy. There is an excellent day care system available for children of working parents. Over the years, other bills were passed to advance the status of women in Israeli society such as the legislation to ensure equal pay for equal work and laws against sexual harassment. Affirmative action legislation passed in the 1990s to address the fact that women are still significantly underrepresented in a number of professions

Israel was the first state to institute compulsory military service for women as well as men although there are specific exemptions and criteria for eligibility that have different applications for men and women, taking into account the religious and social sensibilities of the citizenry. Traditionally, women were excluded from combat roles and from the elite Israeli Air Force.

However, in 2000, the Israeli parliament amended earlier legislation in order to open all of the military to women, including combat units. Earlier, in 1997, a woman filed a lawsuit and won the right to enter the Israeli Air Force. Since then, at least four women completed the course and in 2001, for the first time, a woman graduated as a fighter pilot.

The Israeli government has also been taking steps to advance the human rights of women by working to halt the worldwide and all-too-prevalent trafficking in women.

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Measured by years of schooling, recent studies reveal that there is virtually no educational gap between most Israeli men and women. The proportion of women enrolled in institutions of higher learning has nearly tripled since the mid-1960s. Recently, women earned 57 percent of all academic degrees. Now, at least 46 percent of doctoral students are women.

As in every democracy, in Israel there is a disturbing gap between the ideals expressed in the law and the realities and limitations of everyday life and

custom. For many a woman, Jewish or Arab, her reality is often influenced or constrained by the social traditions, community attitudes and religious imperatives in her particular community.

Areas remain in which tradition and religious institutions prevail, particularly in matters of personal status (marriage and divorce). However there are a growing number of services to advocate for women in these arenas. There is also an increasingly active women's movement that has improved opportunities for fair representation for women in these matters that fall under the jurisdiction of the religious courts.

Legal clinics, shelters for battered women, emergency hot lines, and services for single-parent families are available to assist women in need. For the past 48 years, there have been organizations to encourage understanding, support and partnerships between Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli women.

Although, in 2000, 45.44 percent of the labor force was female, women's wages were consistently lower than those of men. Most women workers are still concentrated in lower-paying jobs.

Grassroots advocacy groups are active in order to advance women's status through the courts and with legislation and to promote the enforcement of existing laws.

In the past few years, there has been visible progress. Women are more likely now to be present in management and decision-making positions in the workplace. Women have increased participation in local government in order to make the authorities more responsive to their needs and concerns.