



# Women's Rights TIP Kit



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## Introduction: Women's Rights in Israel

As the Arab world convulses in revolution, threatening secular dictatorships and theocracies alike, the future of women's rights in the region remains in question.

Amid the upheaval, the liberal democracy of Israel – while far from perfect – remains a reliable defender of women's rights. All women in Israel, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity, enjoy broad freedoms, rights and protections, including the right to vote, freedom of expression and career choices. Women are protected by law from discrimination. Israel's Declaration of Independence grants "all Israel's inhabitants equality of social and political rights irrespective of religion, race or gender."<sup>1</sup>

Three years after declaring statehood in 1948, Israel passed legislation guaranteeing women the right to live in dignity, including providing equality in work, education, health and social welfare. During its 63 years of existence, Israeli society has undertaken many steps to advance the status of women. As a result, women have progressed in multiple spheres of Israeli life, such as politics, economics, education, the domestic realm and the military.

Despite impressive strides, however, Israel – like so many other countries – still contends with gaps in gender equality in a number of areas.<sup>2</sup> Among the most notable are wages: Men's salaries remain about 20 percent higher overall than women's. And in executive positions, men make 52 percent more than women. That said, women in Israel comprise close to a third of executives, half of the country's judges and hold 47 percent of academic posts.<sup>3</sup>

"A prominent woman who has managed to break the glass ceiling is merely a fig leaf concealing the discrimination against women, and their exclusion from senior positions," said Dr. Shlomit Yanisky-Ravid, head of the Women At Work project at Ono Academic College.<sup>4</sup>

The following press kit provides a summary of the freedoms enjoyed by all Israeli women, the overall progress Israel has made in gender equality, and a list of expert sources for journalists to find further information about women's rights in Israel.

~ This press kit was compiled by Ari Bildner, TIP's U.S. Communications Writer / Media Communications Associate. ~

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Facts+about+Israel--+The+State/A+Free+People+in+Our+Land-+Declaration+of+Independence.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-sliding-down-world-gender-gap-index-1.393390>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-sliding-down-world-gender-gap-index-1.393390>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-sliding-down-world-gender-gap-index-1.393390>



## Israeli Women in Politics and Public Affairs

Since Israel's establishment in 1948, dozens of women have served in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), and have held leadership roles in politics and civil society.

- Thirteen women have served as cabinet ministers, including Golda Meir, Israel's first - and the world's third - female prime minister; currently, three women - Orit Noked, Limor Livnat and Sofa Landver - serve in the cabinet.<sup>5</sup>
- Israeli-Arab women actively participate in political life. Nadia Hilou became the second Israeli-Arab woman to serve in the Knesset when she took office in 2006. Israel-Arab MK Hanin Zoabi currently represents the National Democratic Assembly list.
- At present, 23 Knesset members are women<sup>6</sup>
- Tzipi Livni, previously vice premier and minister of foreign affairs now heads Israel's opposition party, Kadima; Dorit Beinisch is president of Israel's Supreme Court.

Israel's unshakable commitment to women's rights has also kept Israeli leaders responsible for their misdeeds. In December 2010, a district court found former Israeli president Moshe Katsav guilty of raping an employee in the 1990s when he was serving as tourism minister and of later sexual offenses while he was president.

Although the episode showcased a women's rights abuse at the highest level of government. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described it as "a sad day." This incident also highlighted the strength of Israel's judicial system.<sup>7</sup>

"All men and women are equal under the law, and women have full rights over their own bodies," Netanyahu said on hearing the verdict.

"There are severe punishments for such crimes regardless of who committed them, and this verdict encourages women to go to the authorities if they encounter any sexual abuse," Women Against Violence Center advisor Linda Khawaled told The Israel Project.

As is common in Israel's Western judicial system, Katsav appealed the conviction, and as of fall 2011, the court is still deliberating on the case.

### **Israel joins UN Women**

In early 2011, Israel joined the executive board of U.N. Women<sup>8</sup>, a newly created entity that merged four separate United Nations groups that dealt with women's rights. Although the body has singled out Israel for criticism while

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts%20About%20Israel/State/Women%20in%20Public%20Life>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/MKIndex\\_Current\\_eng.asp?view=1](http://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/MKIndex_Current_eng.asp?view=1)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.theisraelproject.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=hsJPK0PIJpH&b=689705&ct=8989811>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=203373>



ignoring major women's rights offenders such as Iran, the Israeli government believed that Israel could have a positive impact in promoting women's rights worldwide.<sup>9</sup>

Upon cabinet approval for Israel to join U.N. Women, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu stated that "since its establishment, the State of Israel has been known as a pioneer in the field of advancing women's status and has a proven record in the area of gender equality."<sup>10</sup>

The Prime Minister added that "Israel's influence in a prominent international body in the field is necessary because the issue of women's status is a main policy issue for us and because Israel's contribution to such a body from its inception could be considerable for the countries of the world."

However, women's rights groups cautioned that Israel's admission should not take the focus off shortcomings of women's rights in the Jewish state. "We hope that this step is not only an effort to halt the criticism of Israel, but instead to bring about genuine discussion and understanding of the status of women in the world and the advancement of Israeli women's situation locally," commented lawyer Keren Shemesh-Perlmutter, director of Itach – Women Lawyers for Social Justice.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Social Protests of Summer 2011**

In the summer of 2011, women played a major role in the massive street protests for social reform and economic justice throughout Israel. The formation of "tent cities" in Tel Aviv and other Israeli population centers were largely attributed to 25-year-old video editor Daphne Leef, whose rent in June doubled, rendering her apartment unaffordable.<sup>12</sup>

Angered by the soaring cost of housing, Leef pitched a tent on Rothschild Boulevard, Tel Aviv's glitzy thoroughfare. A week later, thousands turned out to demonstrate for a better and more affordable quality of life, and by the end of July, the protests had spread to Jerusalem and other major urban centers. On July 29, major women's groups including WIZO and Na'amat officially joined the protests.<sup>13</sup>

On July 28, about 1,500 parents, many of them young mothers, demonstrated in the so-called "Stroller March" to raise awareness of the high cost of raising children in Israel. A week later, they presented a list of demands to the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women. The parliamentary group said it would discuss the measures - including building more daycare centers to ease the burden on young, working mothers.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2011/03/20/un-womens-rights-commission-singles-out-israel-for-condemnation-ignores-iran/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=203373>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/world/july-dec11/israel\\_08-19.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/world/july-dec11/israel_08-19.html)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/women-s-groups-join-popular-protests-in-israel-1.376013>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=232206&R=R2>



As a result of Leef's and others' efforts, Prime Minister Netanyahu set up the Trajtenberg Committee to investigate ways to make the cost of living in Israel more affordable. As of Nov. 1, the government has begun implementing taxation reforms in line with the panel's recommendations.



## Israeli Women in the Military

*“The Army is the supreme symbol of duty, and as long as women are not equal to men in performing this duty, they have not yet obtained true equality. If the daughters of Israel are absent from the army, then the character of the Yishuv (Jewish community in Israel) will be distorted.”*

**-David Ben Gurion  
First Israeli Prime Minister**

Military service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is considered the “great equalizer” between the sexes in Israeli society. The National Service Law, passed in 1953, mandated two years of compulsory military service for men and women alike. Today, conscription extends to all able-bodied men and women once they are 18, although potential conscripts can request exemptions on religious and other grounds. Men are required to serve three years and women are required to serve two years.

Since the National Service Law was passed in 1953, women have made visible and dramatic strides in the IDF. For example:

- In 2005, 60 percent of army professions were open to women. By 2010, that number had reached about 90 percent;<sup>15</sup>
- Since 1999, following an Israeli Supreme Court decision, women have been admitted to train as Air Force pilots and navigators. In 2001, the Israeli Air Force Academy graduated its first female combat pilot. In 2011, there were 30 female cadets.<sup>16</sup>
- In 2011, the Israeli military welcomed the appointment of the first female Major-General in the IDF, Maj. Gen. Orna Barbibay.<sup>17</sup>

Recently, the IDF has begun using 18- and 19-year-old female soldiers in roles as “spotters” to identify and report terrorist activity along the Gaza border.<sup>18</sup>

Some challenges remain in fully integrating women into the IDF. In July of 2011, the outgoing Personnel Directorate wrote a document calling for the army to stop the increasing religious extremism which has tended to breed discrimination against women in the ranks. “I don't know if the army is purposely sacrificing women on the altar of

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hadassahmagazine.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=twl6LmN7lzF&b=6115747&ct=8182481>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/despite-israel-air-force-s-efforts-at-integration-few-women-graduating-from-pilot-courses-1.371476>

<sup>17</sup> <http://idfspokesperson.com/2011/06/23/israeli-army-celebrates-first-ever-female-major-general/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/idf-s-newest-heroes-women-spotters-on-gaza-border-1.264024>



religion, but I have no doubt that it is under great pressure to reduce or stop the process of absorbing women, and the pressure comes from this direction," [wrote Outgoing Personnel Chief Avi Zamir](#).<sup>19</sup>

Recently, many religious male soldiers in the IDF have refused to attend military events where female soldiers sing. In September, nine religious cadets walked out of a ceremony at which a female soldier sang solo, and the issue has escalated to the point of legal action. However, religious authorities and military commanders are working on a plan to resolve the issue.<sup>20</sup>

### **Officer and Commanding Roles**

Approximately half of all soldiers in officer courses are women. During the last three years:

- An average of 55 percent of all staff officers in the Officers Training Course were women.
- An average of 53 percent of OTC graduates became officers in combat support positions.

One shortcoming is the fact that an average of three percent of all combat officers were women, although before 2000 women were banned completely from the position.<sup>21</sup>

In the last several years alone, women in the IDF have achieved high-ranking positions, integrated themselves successfully into combat units, protected the country's borders, revolutionized military law, and directly impacted national security.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/full-integration-of-women-into-idf-would-be-good-for-israel-s-security-1.374356>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4120830,00.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://idfspokesperson.com/2011/03/07/women-in-the-idf/>



## Israeli Women in the Workforce/Economy

Israeli law protects the right of women to equal opportunity in the workplace. Since the 1950s, women's opportunities in the workplace have been secured by legislation guaranteeing a maternity leave allowance paid by the National Insurance Institute, protection against dismissal during pregnancy and affordable childcare facilities. In 1964, legislation was passed mandating that women receive pay equal to that of men.<sup>22</sup>

Today, women are making great strides in the Israeli workforce. In 2009 the work force grew by 20,500 men and 46,700 women, with women accounting for 69 percent of the overall growth.<sup>23</sup> Though Israeli women still haven't achieved equal pay, women have risen to the level of CEO in several Israeli Fortune 500 companies. Examples include Dalia Narkiss, CEO of Israel's largest employment agency, Manpower; and Galia Maor, CEO of leading commercial bank Bank Leumi. At 15 percent, Israel has the second highest percentage of women as corporation directors, falling behind only Norway. Indeed, on the Women's Economic Opportunity Index, Israel in 2010 is ranked relatively high at 28, in the company of countries like Spain, Greece and Estonia.<sup>24 25</sup>

To be sure, challenges to the full integration and equality of women in the economy remain. Israeli women still make 83 percent of what their male counterparts earn. Sixty-five percent of those making minimum wage or less are women, and on average, Arab women make less than their Israeli colleagues.<sup>26</sup>

Chairwoman and CEO of Arison Investments Efrat Peled, 37, was ranked 44<sup>th</sup> in Forbes 2011 "50 Most Powerful Women in Business and profiled in CNN/Money's 2011 "10 Global Women on the Rise."<sup>27 28</sup>

As of 2010, 65 percent of employees in the civil service are women; most of them are in management positions or support services.<sup>29</sup>

Israeli government initiatives consistently strive to ensure full equality for women. Legislative efforts include:

- The Equal Retirement Age Law, passed in 1987, and the Equal Employment Opportunities law, passed in 1988;<sup>30</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nysun.com/new-york/feminist-magazine-rejects-ad-featuring-israeli/69338/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=211215>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=170369>

<sup>25</sup> [http://wikigender.org/index.php/wikigender.org:Variables\\_Women%E2%80%99s\\_Economic\\_Opportunity\\_Index](http://wikigender.org/index.php/wikigender.org:Variables_Women%E2%80%99s_Economic_Opportunity_Index)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.nif.org/images/assets/pdfs/10-Facts-You-Probably-Didnt-know-about-women-in-Israel.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter\\_article.php?id=1305](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=1305)

<sup>28</sup>

[http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2011/news/international/1109/gallery.most\\_powerful\\_women\\_new\\_global\\_leaders.fortune/8.htm](http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2011/news/international/1109/gallery.most_powerful_women_new_global_leaders.fortune/8.htm)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=170369>



- 14-week paid maternity leave, plus an optional, additional 12-week unpaid leave, for all women guaranteed by law;<sup>31</sup>
- Amendments to the Equal Rights Law, added in 2000, which mandated representation by women at all levels in public entities.

In the Israeli national trade union (Histadrut), women are represented at each level. The Histadrut has adopted a resolution requiring that 30 percent of its leadership must be women.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, Israel's Ministry of Commerce and Industry has established a unit to encourage women to open small- and medium-sized businesses. The unit has aided Bedouin women in Israel in setting up small businesses and is providing them the planning and marketing skills necessary to maximize their success. The Negev Institute for Strategies and Development also instituted a project in southern Israel to provide Bedouin women with vocational, entrepreneurial and managerial training, combined with financial support and counseling.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/ifpdial/info/national/is.htm#\\_Toc14149959](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/ifpdial/info/national/is.htm#_Toc14149959)

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3864344,00.html>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/%28Symbol%29/CCPR.CO.78.ISR.En?OpenDocument>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/State/Women+in+Public+Life.htm>



## Israeli Women in Society

Women's rights groups in the Israeli government, along with an array of non-governmental women's advocacy organizations, have long focused national attention on policy issues ranging from domestic abuse to reproductive rights and health care.<sup>34</sup>

Laws and groups aimed at protecting women at home and work include:

- The Committee on the Status of Women, which advances legislation on issues such as equality at work, violence against women, welfare, health and fertility;
- The Authority for the Advancement of Women, which monitors and coordinates activities of government and local authorities regarding women's status in the workplace. It also promotes legislation and advises the government on the enforcement of laws promoting the status of women;
- The Domestic Violence Prevention Law, which enables victims of domestic violence to issue restraining orders against abusive domestic partners;
- The Law Preventing Sexual Harassment, which prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, Israel has 14 government shelters for battered women, including two dedicated to Arab women, and 60 centers for the prevention of violence against women, which include programs to rehabilitate violent husbands.<sup>36 37</sup>

In addition to 14 weeks of paid maternity leave for all women, Israeli law includes a provision that mothers may use paid sick-leave to tend to their sick children.<sup>38 39</sup>

### Challenges

As much of the laws pertaining to Israeli women come from the growing religious sector in Israeli society, the country faces obstacles in ensuring gender equality. Issues like marriage and divorce are the responsibility of the religious rather than civil authorities. This situation places various restrictions on the ability of women to have complete freedom in such matters. Israeli society is still working to reconcile the religious character of the Jewish state with the gender equality inherent in a liberal democracy.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.theisraelproject.org/atf/cf/%7B84DC5887-741E-4056-8D91-A389164BC94E%7D/WOMEN%20NGOS.DOC>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2001/8/The%20Advancement%20of%20the%20Status%20of%20Women%20-%20Israel%2020](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/The%20Advancement%20of%20the%20Status%20of%20Women%20-%20Israel%2020)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/Maor.html>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/%28Symbol%29/CCPR.CO.78.ISR.En?OpenDocument>

<sup>38</sup> <http://gov.il/FirstGov/TopNavEng/EngSituations/ESMigrantWorkersGuide/ESMWGMaternity/>

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2001/8/The%20Advancement%20of%20the%20Status%20of%20Women%20-%20Israel%2020](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/The%20Advancement%20of%20the%20Status%20of%20Women%20-%20Israel%2020)



Another separate but major concern is the rise in human trafficking. The U.S. Department of State has mentioned Israel in its reports for the high volume of illicit human- and often women- trafficking. In response, Israel in recent years increased its police activity and opened shelters for trafficked women. In 2006, a new anti-trafficking law came into force that mandated more stringent sentences for traffickers.<sup>404142</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4088190,00.html>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/488f180c1e.html>

<sup>42</sup> <http://tfht.org/trafficking-in-persons-report-2009-israel/>

## Women's Rights in the Arab World



**Egypt:** Women were out in force during the popular uprisings that toppled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, but their future in post-revolutionary Egypt is not so certain.

Women's rights activist Engy Ghozlan says that what happened on International Women's Day in March shows that the revolution has not changed any of Egypt's social problems. With no police present and the army initially keeping their distance, women were sexually harassed, beaten and even threatened with knives.

Egypt is ranked 120 out of 128 countries in gender equality by the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, with emphasis on its low performance in the subcategories of political

empowerment and genuine female opportunity in the economy.

**Gaza:** Since Hamas seized full control over the Gaza Strip in 2007, Palestinian women have been deprived of many of basic rights, including walking along the beach alone or smoking in public. Women also are barred from going to male hairdressers. Under Hamas, female lawyers are not allowed to appear in court unless they are wearing a hijab.

A woman who is seen in public with a man is often stopped by Hamas policemen and questioned about the nature of the relationship between them.

Women in the Gaza Strip who have dared to participate in public political and social events have been repeatedly harassed by the Hamas government. As a result, many of them have been forced to stay at home out of fear for their lives.

**Iran:** Women's rights in Iran have been curtailed since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, but in recent years, women have been displaying an increasing determination to achieve equal status in this conservative Muslim theocracy. Women are forced to cover their hair and they have consistently been subjected to intimidation in public over what they wear. Men can have several wives, but they are generally supposed to get permission from their current ones.

**Iraq:** Iraq's constitution, adopted in 2005, originally allotted 25 percent of seats to women. However, this quota has not been filled since 2005. Iraqi women are struggling to regain the relatively high status they enjoyed in the 1970s and '80s, partly because of the strong influence of Islamists. Female lawmakers there complain of being largely ignored by their male peers. Domestic abuse has increased during the years of war and attempts to strengthen laws to protect women have gone nowhere in the face of heavy cultural and religious resistance.



**Israel:** Compared to those in neighboring Arab countries, Israeli women enjoy far greater freedoms and protections. Israel's political, economic and social freedoms, like those in Western Democracies, ensure a robust female presence in public life. In addition, a host of civil society organizations act as watchdogs and defenders of such rights.

Yet Israel, like other major democracies, must confront the shortcomings of gender equality. Women still make less than men on average; Arab women are less economically integrated than their Jewish counterparts. The increasing religiosity of the nation presents a unique consideration for women's rights advocates, as the nation tries to reconcile the Jewish character of the state with the demands of a liberal democratic society.

**Jordan:** Jordanian women largely enjoy legal equality in freedom of movement, health care, education, political participation and employment. But gender-based violence remains a serious concern. Women may be severely beaten, or even murdered, if they disobey their male family members or commit an act deemed "dishonorable," such as socializing with an unrelated man.

Muslim women are prohibited from marrying men of other religions unless the spouse agrees to convert to Islam, while Muslim men are permitted to wed Christian and Jewish wives.

**Libya:** The announcement that Islamic Sharia law will be the basis of legislation in newly liberated Libya has raised concerns among women.

Interim leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil said during his speech to the nation in Benghazi to formally declare the country's liberation from the ousted regime of Muammar Gaddafi, that Sharia law would be Libya's principal law.

"Any law that violates Sharia is null and void legally," he said, citing as an example the law on marriage passed during the slain dictator's 42-year tenure that imposed restrictions on polygamy, which is permitted in Islam.

**Saudi Arabia:** All women, regardless of age, are required to have a male guardian. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that prohibits women from driving. Women cannot vote or be elected to high political positions. However, King Abdullah has declared that women will be able to vote and run in the 2015 local elections, and be on his advisory council.

**Syria:** Syria's constitution guarantees gender equality, and many women are active in public life, but personal status laws as well as the penal code contain provisions that discriminate against women and girls.

A number of sections of family and criminal law are based on Sharia law and do not treat men and women equally. According to the U.S. State Department, the law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, and violence against women including "honor killings" occur. The majority of domestic violence and sexual assault cases go unreported; victims have traditionally been reluctant to seek assistance outside the family for fear of social stigmatization.



**Yemen:** Although women were granted equal rights with men per the 1994 Yemeni Constitution, women still have struggles with many constraints and secondary status towards men. Women still did not have equal rights and are still excluded from general decision making including marriage, child custody and divorce.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Yemeni activist Tawakkol Karman became a call to action for thousands of women to gather at the capital to break their silence. They spread a black cloth across a street, stripped off their full-bodied veils used to cover their faces and entire bodies, and set the veils on fire.



## Israeli Women at the Helm: Profiles of Leadership

### **Limor Livnat: Minister of Culture and Sport**



**Limor Livnat** (b. 1950) is Israel's Minister of Culture and Sport and a Likud party member. She previously held that portfolio from 2001-2006, and was Minister of Communications from 1996-1999.

Since becoming a member of the Knesset in 1992, she has chaired the Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women and its Parliamentary Committee for Inquiry into Domestic Violence, as well as the Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women. Livnat also served as vice-chairperson of the World Likud Movement and as head of the Likud Information Committee.

She is married and has two children.

*Limor Livnat*  
Photo courtesy  
Knesset

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### **Sofa Landver: Minister of Immigrant Absorption**



*"Thirty years ago I immigrated with my family to Israel. More than once I protested outside the Absorption Ministry for immigrants' welfare, and this is the fulfillment of a dream to be given the most important seat in the country.*

--Sofa Landver, from an April 3, 2009 *Haaretz* article

**Sofa Landver** (b. 1949), Israel's Minister of Immigrant Absorption and a Yisrael Beiteinu party member, was born in Leningrad in the Soviet Union (now St. Petersburg, Russia).

Sofa Landver

Photo courtesy of Knesset A speech therapist, Landver immigrated to Israel in 1979 and has been a member of the Knesset since 1996, serving on several committees there. Landver previously served as deputy minister of transportation. She has also served as chairperson of the National Association of Russian Immigrants, a member of the Ashdod City Council, a director of the Ashdod Development Company and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Agency.

She is married and has one child.

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### **Tzipi Livni: Opposition Leader (Kadima Party), Former Foreign Minister and Vice Prime Minister**



Tzipi Livni Photo  
Courtesy of Israel  
Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs

*"We cannot afford a failure and we need a success, and the success of the process depends, of course, on the ability of each party to make the necessary historical reconciliation and compromises."*

--Tzipi Livni, from remarks on Israeli-Palestinian peace prospects at the Davos World Economic Forum in January 2008

**Tzipi Livni** (b. 1958), Knesset opposition leader (Kadima party) and Israel's former foreign minister and vice prime minister, was born in Israel and served as an Israel Defense Forces officer and in the Israeli Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations (the "Mossad").

Livni was elected to the Knesset in 1999 and served as a member of the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee; the Committee on the Status of Women; and chairwoman of the subcommittee responsible for legislation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Law.

As a Knesset member, Livni held portfolios in the committees on regional cooperation and agriculture; immigrant absorption; housing and construction; and justice and foreign affairs. In 2005, she left the Likud Party to help form the Kadima Party along with other prominent Israeli politicians.

Livni served as foreign minister and vice prime minister in the 31st Government of Israel from 2006 - 2009 (the 17th Knesset). She also served as minister of justice from November 2006 - February 2007.

She is married and has two children.

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### **Gabriela Shalev: Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN**



Gabriela Shalev  
Photo courtesy  
of Israel Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs

*"...It is my hope that together, Israel and the committed Jewish Diaspora here in America...will work to reaffirm the values of human rights, the dignity of the human person, the equal treatment of men and women, and of all nations large and small."* --Gabriela Shalev, from remarks at Council of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations

Ambassador Gabriela Shalev was the Israel's 14th Permanent Representative to the United Nations. She began her tenure on Sept. 3, 2008, marking the first time a woman was appointed to this post, and stepped down in October 2010.

Ambassador Shalev previously served as President of the Academic Council and Rector of Ono Academic College in Israel. Until her early retirement in 2002, she was also a full professor of contract law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and wrote nine books and more than 100 articles about contract law. Prof. Shalev was also a visiting law professor at universities in the U.S., Europe and Canada. She has received numerous awards and has served on several prestigious boards.



She currently serves as president of the Higher Academic Council of Ono Academic College in Israel.

Shalev's husband was killed in Israel's defensive 1973 Yom Kippur War.

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### **Dorit Beinisch: Supreme Court President**



*"The Supreme Court must be... protected from those who aspire to turn it into an institution based on political representation or one that reflects in its composition and work procedures the party divisions in Israeli society."*

--Dorit Beinisch, from a speech given as she took her oath of office in September 2006

**Dorit Beinisch** (b. 1942) is chief justice of Israel's Supreme Court. She was born in Israel and served in the Israel Defense Forces as a first lieutenant before completing her law studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1968.

Dorit Beinisch

Photo Courtesy of Reuters Beinisch served as assistant attorney general (1982-1988) and in 1989 was appointed attorney general. In that capacity, she headed the General Prosecution Department, representing the State of Israel in various law courts and providing legal advice to state authorities.

In December 1995, Beinisch was appointed to the Supreme Court and was elected chief justice in 2006.

She is married and has two daughters.

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### **Dalia Itzik: Former Knesset Speaker**

*"The existence of the State of Israel is a miracle, but our democracy is even a greater miracle."*

--Dalia Itzik, from a speech in March 2007 celebrating the Knesset's 58th anniversary

**Dalia Itzik** (b. 1952), former speaker of the Knesset, was born in Israel and has served in a variety of positions in Israeli public life, including minister of industry and trade; minister of communications; deputy mayor of Jerusalem in charge of education; and chairwoman of the Labor Party's legislative panel.

Itzik holds academic degrees in literature and history, education and law. She was elected to the Knesset in 1992 and has chaired the Education and Culture Committee and the Labor-Meimad parliamentary group. She has served as a member on several committees, including the Committee



Dalia Itzik  
Photo Courtesy of  
Israel Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs



for the Advancement of the Status of Women. In 2006, Itzik was appointed speaker of the Knesset and in 2007 also served as acting president of the State of Israel.

Itzik is married and has three children.

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### Golda Meir: Israel's Fourth Prime Minister



*"It is true we have won all our wars, but we have paid for them. We don't want victories anymore."*

--Golda Meir, from a 1969 LIFE magazine article

*"Pessimism is a luxury that a Jew can never allow himself."*

--Golda Meir, from a 1974 article published in *The Observer (London)*

**Golda Meir (1898-1978)** was Israel's fourth prime minister, a diplomat and a Labor Zionist Party leader.

Golda Meir Meir served in the Knesset from 1949 to 1956. As Israel's foreign minister from 1956 to 1966, Meir used her position to initiate Israel's policy of cooperation with the newly independent nations of Africa and cement ties with Latin American countries. After serving as secretary-general in the Labor Party (1966-1968), Meir was elected prime minister in 1969.

Photo Courtesy of Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
As prime minister, Meir ushered in a cease-fire agreement with Egypt, ending the War of Attrition (1967-1970) despite the advancing threat of Egyptian missiles on the Suez Canal front. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which neighboring Arab counties launched a surprise attack on Israel during the Jewish Day of Atonement, Meir demonstrated strong leadership and managed to secure an American airlift of arms. Though an investigative commission exonerated her from direct responsibility for Israel's lack of preparedness for the war, Meir bowed to what she felt was the "will of the people" and resigned in mid-1974.

Meir died in December 1978, at the age of 80.

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### Nadia Hilou: Former Member of Knesset

*"I am particularly conscious of my position and the significance it carries because of my background... I was in the square with my two youngest daughters the night Rabin was killed. It was so emotional... it provided the final push that convinced me that I had to become active to push change and work for peace."*

--Nadia Hilou, from an interview with The Jerusalem Post in April 2006

**Nadia Hilou (b. 1953)** was Israel's first Arab-Christian female member of Knesset.



Nadia Hilou  
Photo Courtesy of Knesset



Hilou was born in Israel and received academic degrees in social work from Tel Aviv University. She was an active force in the Knesset on issues important to women and headed the Knesset's Committee on the Rights of the Child and was also a member of its Committee on the Status of Women. Hilou served as deputy chairwoman for Na'amat Women's Organization (2002-2006) and as director of the Division for the Status of Women in the Union of Local Authorities (1997-2006).

Hilou strongly believes in advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and coexistence projects between Jews and Arabs. She was a member of the Knesset's Lobby for Jewish-Arab Coexistence and has called the city of Jaffa, in which she has spent her entire life, a natural coexistence project.

Hilou is married and has four children.

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### **Raya Strauss Bendror: Co-founder and President of Strauss-Elite Group**



**Raya Strauss Bendror** is the co-owner and president of Strauss Investments, Ltd. Raya was the second generation co-owner with her brother Michael of the billion-dollar food conglomerate Strauss.

Strauss Bendror has deep support for and involvement with a wide range of projects and organizations, which reflect her belief in people, and the love of humanity and the state of Israel. A leader in Israeli corporate social responsibility, she has been a social, public and personal activist through her involvement, partnership and support of a wide range of projects and organizations such as MAALA (Business for Social Responsibility in Israel) and the Reut Institute (strategic advice on security and socioeconomics). She has also worked with homeless teens and on projects providing leadership and excellence training for marginalized teens.

Raya Strauss  
Bendror  
Courtesy of  
www.aliyah.org

Her main activities are Co-chair of "partnership 2Gether" in Israel, President of "partnership 2Gether" in Nahariya and north New Jersey. She is a major supporter of the following organizations: Beit Hashanti – home for homeless youth, Keshet Eilon Music center – violin master classes at the Galilee, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company – modern dancing in the Galilee, Reut Institute – strategic decision support for Israeli leaders & decision makers, President of the friends association of the Western Galilee hospital, Acharay – youth leading social change, Or Movement – for the development of the Galilee and the Negev, Tzeva – for the education of endangered children, The Rabin leadership program in the IDC, Midot – for enhancing the affectivity of philanthropy, and one of the founders of MAALA – for enhancing social responsibility among organizations.



### Dr. Einat Wilf: Member of Knesset



**Dr. Einat Wilf** is a Member of Knesset in the Independence faction. She serves on the Foreign Affairs and Defense, Education, and House committees. Dr. Wilf is the author of two books that explore key issues in Israeli society. Her first book, "[My Israel, Our Generation](#)," about Israel's past and future from the perspective of the younger generation, was published in Hebrew in 2003 and in English in 2006.

Her second book, "[Back to Basics: How to Save Israeli Education \(at no additional cost\)](#)," which offers a detailed and feasible policy proposal for saving Israel's ailing education system, was published in Hebrew in 2008 by Yedioth Achronot. Previously, Dr. Wilf served as a Senior Fellow with the Jewish

People Policy Planning Institute, wrote a weekly column in the Israeli daily newspaper 'Israel Hayom', taught social entrepreneurship at Sapir College, was a member of the President's Conference Steering Committee, a Foreign Policy Advisor to Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres, a strategic consultant with McKinsey & Company in New York City and a General Partner with Koor Corporate Venture Capital in Israel.

Born and raised in Israel, Dr. Wilf served as an Intelligence Officer in the Israel Defense Forces and holds a BA in Government and Fine Arts from Harvard University, an MBA from INSEAD in France, and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Cambridge.



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