

# MEMO

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March 8, 2018

## **Israel: A Global Leader on Women's Issues**

**On March 8, the world celebrates International Women's Day. Since its founding, Israel has emerged as a leader in promoting gender equality and protecting the rights of women—carefully balancing diverse religious sensitivities with strong support for universal rights—all of which is unprecedented in the Middle East. Today, Israeli women of all faiths serve as leaders in government, the military, business and civil society, propelling the nation forward as agents of change, peace and prosperity.**

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### **Women's Rights are Human Rights**

- Israel is the only nation in the Middle East where female citizens enjoy full equality. Israeli law forbids discrimination and abuse, and women participate extensively in military, professional and political life.
- Israel ensures full legal protections for women against gender discrimination. Just three years after the country's founding, the Knesset passed the Women's Equal Rights Law. This important act guarantees equal protection under the law and provides the legal basis for gender equality in all spheres of life.

### **Breaking the Glass Ceiling**

- In 1969, when Golda Meir was elected prime minister, Israel became just the third country in the world to elect a woman to lead its government. Women serve in key roles throughout the Israeli political system, and have held posts including chief justice of the Supreme Court, the speaker of the Knesset, and the permanent representative to the United Nations.
- Women are an intricate part of Israel's "start-up nation" success story. Israel has the highest female entrepreneurship rate in the world. More than 30 percent of managerial positions in Israel's top 100 companies are held by women. In 2009, Israel's Ada Yonath won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry—the first woman in 45 years to win the prize, and the first woman from the Middle East to win a Nobel Prize in the sciences.
- Women have played a critical role in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) since the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, including serving in full combat roles. Israel was one of the first militaries with female combat soldiers, and the IDF assigns 1,500 women to combat positions annually. According to the Equality Amendment to the Military Service Law, women and men have equal rights to serve in any role in the IDF.
- Israel has the largest percentage in the world of women serving in the military. In May 2011, the IDF promoted Orna Barbivai to the rank of Major General and head of the Manpower Directorate—she is the highest-ranking woman in the history of the Israeli military. Women continue to climb the IDF's ranks, accounting for 57 percent of officers among conscripts and 15 percent of top officer positions.
- Today, there are more female Members of Knesset than ever before. With the exception of two ultra-Orthodox parties, every party in the Knesset, including the Arab Joint List, has female members. During the 2015 elections, ultra-Orthodox women came together to form a new party to give voice to the concerns of ultra-Orthodox women.

## **Fostering an Environment Where Women Thrive**

- Since the passage of the 1951 Women's Equal Rights Law, Israel has enacted a series of additional laws to create an environment where women can thrive. In 1964, Israel passed the Male and Female Workers (Equal Pay) Law to ensure equal pay for women. In 2007, the Knesset passed the Gender Implications in Legislation Law, which requires all legislation be analyzed in terms of gender before ratification.
- Israel recognizes the importance of providing education to women on all levels. In 2014, women comprised 60 percent of all students completing a bachelor's degree and 61 percent completing a master's degree. Education for Israeli Arab women has also increased steadily, with women representing 60 percent of Israeli Arab university students.
- Israel's diverse civil society includes organizations from across the religious and political spectrum working to promote women's rights in all facets of society. Na'amat, the first women's rights organization in Israel, was founded in 1921. Today, its membership includes around 800,000 women, including those from Jewish, Muslim and Christian backgrounds.