

# Religion and State in the Past Month

## Week of January 22:

This past week, the Ministry of Religious Services presented the gender analysis of its budget to the Knesset Committee for the Advancement woman. Their presentation was a rerun of the arguments that were presented last year, and had more holes than Swiss cheese. According to Ministry officials, the Ministry's services serve men and women according to their percentage in the population, and thus they claim that 53% of the budget is allocated for the benefit of women and 47% for the benefit of men. In another calculation that was submitted, the claim was made that women benefited from 85% of the Ministry's budget when worship in synagogues and mikvaot (ritual baths) were figured into the calculations. Unfortunately, we did not see a clear segmentation showing how many women were employed by the Ministry, in any positions or in senior roles —contrary to the accepted presentation in all the other ministries – nor was any clear data received showing the proportion of women on religious councils .We urge the Ministry of Religious Services not to show up at the Committee next year, for the third year running, and present the same embarrassing analysis showing that the beneficiaries of the services are divided according to gender segmentation of the population. Women and men In Israel deserve an informed analysis and honorable representation.

For further reading on the JPW website (Hebrew):

<http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18502>

An additional debate concerning the bill initiated by MK Yoav Ben-Tzur (Shas) for proposed exemptions from property taxes levied on religious seminaries and yeshivas took place in the Finance Committee. The Committee decided to approve the bill and bring it to the plenum for a first reading. During the course of the discussion, MK Moshe Gafni (United Torah Judaism) clarified that the exemption from property tax will also be given to religious educational institutions of other religions in Israel, and even to those of Reform Judaism.

We welcome this pluralistic clarification. For further reading on the JPW website (Hebrew): <http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18442>

## Week of January 15:

A meeting with members of the "Jewish Religious Equality Coalition" (JREC) from the American Jewish Committee (AJC) took place this week in the Immigration and Absorption Committee.



Committee chairman MK Avraham Nagosa (Likud) emphasized that "It is important to maintain the relationship with Diaspora Jewry - while maintaining the character of the State of Israel. The different branches of Judaism in the United States wish to be involved in shaping the patterns of Jewish life in Israel, and dialogue is the way to ensure that the Jewish people remain one family." According to Dr. Dov Zakheim, former US Under Secretary of Defense and founder of the Coalition, 85% of US Jewish communities are non-orthodox, and therefore are not recognized by Israel's Chief Rabbinate, and their conversions, marriages and divorces are unrecognized by the State (for matters of personal status). "This disconnection presents a problem to Israel's national security, because distancing American Jews from Israel, as currently manifested, will ultimately lead to the decline of the US administration's support for Israel."

For further reading on the JPW website (Hebrew):

<http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18402>

### **Week of January 8:**

An especially turbulent meeting, chaired by MK Aida Touma-Sliman (Joint List), took place in the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality. The meeting addressed the proposal by MKs Yehuda Glick (Likud) and Abd Al Hakeem Haj Yahya (Joint List) to add an advisory religious cleric to the composition of the committees for termination of pregnancies.

Some of the MKs expressed themselves very sharply against the proposal during the debate, and stressed the need for women's autonomy in deciding to end a pregnancy, something that still does not exist in Israel. For a summary of the debate on JPW website (Hebrew) : <http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18322>

### **Week of January 1:**

This week, the caucus for People Religion and State convened to discuss the growing rift between Israel and world Jewry. The caucus was led by MKs Elazar Stern and Aliza Lavie from the "Yesh Atid" faction, and was attended by many rabbis and representatives from a variety of streams of Judaism. The MKs' remarks appear on the JPW website

(Hebrew): <http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18292> .

The words of Rabbi Dr. Elliot Cosgrove, Rabbi of the Park Avenue Congregation in New York and one of the leaders of the Conservative Movement in North America, stood out in particular.

Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gR1SoANxBmo&t=254s>