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State & Religion

JPW Knesset Update

What We Saw Last Week, and What We Can Expect This Week in the Knesset



Dear Friends!

Another event-packed week has gone by in Israel's Knesset. Sixty-four MKs launched the Jewish People's Caucus which will work to strengthen ties between Israel and Diaspora Jews. The Committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services discussed the procedures for "investigating Jewishness" practised by the rabbinical courts. The Constitution, Law and Justice Committee continued their discussion on the authority of the rabbinical courts over Jews who live abroad.

Is conversion reform on the way? A bill advocating Conversion by Municipal Rabbis and Yeshiva Heads was submitted to the Ministerial Committee for Legislation and will come up for discussion in the Committee for Jewish Religious Services on Tuesday, November 23. The issues of state and religion are part and parcel of the present government's agenda and we will continue to follow and report on all developments in these areas.

As always, we would love to have your comments, ideas and thoughts. Also, you are welcome to invite English speakers to sign up to receive this newsletter by writing to us at: JPW@masorti.org.il

All the best,

Adv. Sharon Banyan

Director, Jewish Pluralism Watch

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Chair, Jewish Pluralism Watch

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Last Week in the Knesset

The Launching of the Jewish People's Caucus

On Monday, November 14, 2021, the Jewish People's Caucus was launched in the Knesset in cooperation with the Jewish Agency. This is the largest Knesset caucus and boasts 64 MKs. The Caucus's activities will involve MKs from both the Right and the Left, from the coalition as well as the opposition, in a campaign to strengthen ties between Israel and Diaspora Jewry, with special focus on connecting the younger generation to Israel and the Jewish world.

Chair of the Caucus, MK Merav Ben Ari (Yesh Atid):

"It is a great privilege for me to lead this caucus. I think that we do not know the Jewish people well enough and this caucus will give us the opportunity to know them better and strengthen ties with Diaspora Jews. The caucus's overriding mission is to build ties between Knesset members and Diaspora Jews. In my opinion this is one of the most important caucuses in the Knesset and I applaud its establishment."

Minister Diaspora Affairs Nachman Shai (Labor):

"This is a heavy responsibility, for the State of Israel to build a relationship of warmth and connectedness between Jewish people and the State of Israel and its citizens. One of the most important steps will be to renew the Kotel Resolution. I will not rest until this is achieved. This is vital for the Jewish people in the Diaspora and for many Israeli citizens."



In the Knesset committees

The committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services

On November 15 the committee discussed “Jews of doubtful status? – a reexamination of the ‘Jewish investigation’ procedure in rabbinical courts” in the wake of an investigative report on Channel 12 News exposing the harm caused by this practice. A stormy discussion ensued during which many reports of injurious behavior were heard and individuals who had been subjected to this examination gave accounts of their experiences.



MK Yulia Malinovsky (Yisrael Beiteinu), Chair of the Committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services:

“I myself experienced this when I got married in the rabbinate and it was not pleasant; I felt as if I was suspected of something and I didn’t know what. The data indicate that Israelis are voting with their feet and more and more couples choose to marry outside the Rabbinate including those who are able to marry through the rabbinate but feel that this institution does not represent them.”

MK Moshe (Kinley) Tur-Paz (Yesh Atid):

“The law is unfair. We are all immigrants. My parents made aliyah from England and were not required to have their Jewishness examined and neither was I when I got married. Our responsibility as Knesset members is to

make halacha more flexible and to offer a more welcoming and inclusive conversion. At the end of the day, we have to think about who determines halacha. Looking back in history, each community made its own decisions. The community's commitment to the individual is greater than that of government's whose agencies are sometimes unsympathetic and detached."

The Constitution, Law and Justice Committee

On November 17, The committee continued the discussion on the Rabbinical Jurisdiction Bill – Marriage and Divorce (giving permanent status to temporary provisions).

MK Gilad Kariv, the Committee Chair, pointed to the difference in the attitude of the rabbinical court to "agunot" ("chained" women whose husbands refuse to grant them a Jewish divorce) abroad and those in Israel:

"If only the rabbinical court would adopt this doctrine in the Israeli courts: The Israeli courts have a harsh policy while the policy in the Diaspora is different. The courts treat agunot in Israel more severely than in the Diaspora. According to Jewish law, a woman cannot end her marriage, she is kept prisoner by her husband and if she has children then these children are bastards. Such a state of affairs does not exist in any other country."



Bills

A bill for an Amendment to the Order of the Religious Community (conversion) (Conversion by Municipal Rabbis and Yeshiva Heads) was brought before the Ministerial Committee for Legislation. The bill was initiated by Yisrael Beitenu MKs **Yulia**

Malinovsky, Evgeny Sova, Alex Kushnir, Limor Magen Telem and Elena Bardach Yalov.

The bill cites a lack of legal clarity around the issue of conversion that harms potential converts and causes a variety of problems. The special conversion courts do not offer a solution for most converts and as a consequence, close to 400,000 immigrants and their offspring are not recognized as Jews by the State of Israel. To remedy this problem, the bill offers municipal rabbis and heads of yeshivas who hold official or semi-official positions the authorization to grant certificates of conversion.

JPW's Education Desk

JPW conducts tailor-made seminars, webinars and conferences - physically or online - on contemporary issues of state and religion, meeting with MKs

and in-depth discussions on the political aspects of freedom of religion and pluralism in Israel. For further details please email to devora@masorti.org.il



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