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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!

It's been a very long time since we sent you an update about our work.

This is the time to let you know we have a new director - Adv. Sharon Banyan.

Sharon grew up in the Magen Avraham Masorti Congregation in the southern town of Omer. During her military service in the IDF Spokesperson Unit, she served as spokeswoman for the Gaza Division and was discharged with the rank of Captain after five years. Sharon is a graduate of the "Lala Tusk-Radzyner Honors Program for Law Students" at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. During her studies, she also worked as the spokeswoman for the Masorti Movement in Israel for three years. Following graduation from law school, she worked as a legal intern in the Deputy Attorney General's Office for International Law. Sharon was subsequently hired to work there as a lawyer for a year and a half before returning to the Masorti Movement as Director of the Jewish Pluralism Watch civil tracking institute on matters of religion and state. Sharon is married to Tom, and a mother to three daughters, Noya, Gaya, and Alma.

Another interesting update is that a few months ago, JPW's staff began the process of reexamining and focusing our role in the field of Jewish pluralism over the years. We realized that the huge database we have developed throughout the years can no longer stand alone - there is a need to turn this

knowledge into power. Thus was conceived the idea to add a policy-promoting aspect to JPW alongside our dedicated, professional monitoring.

These days, we are holding a series of deliberations and consultations regarding which issues we would like to promote and in which we already have a relative advantage. We consult with intellectuals, Members of Knesset, civil and political activists and members of civil society organizations. The Institute's refocusing will allow us to lead policy strategies and promote Jewish pluralism and equality through advocacy, plenary and committee discussions, agenda proposals, queries and other policy advancement tools.

In this newsletter you will find recent updates on contemporary issues of state and religion. Simultaneously, we are updating our website and Facebook page that will keep you updated. Stay tuned!

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

Emily Levy-Shochat

Chair, Jewish Pluralism Watch

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Last Week in the Knesset

The events of Rosh Hodesh Kislev at the Western Wall have thrust the Kotel Resolution back into the spotlight. The Masorti (Conservative) Movement's letter together with the response from the leaders of the coalition factions and even the opposition's reaction, have brought back the Kotel Resolution into the public discourse and hopefully onto the government's agenda (various public statements appear further down in the newsletter and of course on our website).

At the same time, the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee met to discuss *agunot*, or "chained" women whose husbands refuse to grant them a divorce, and the scope of the rabbinical court's authority abroad; a bill submitted by MK Yulia Malinovsky on the defacement of public notices featuring images of women was brought before the plenum, and the Minister of Religious Affairs Matan Kahana outlined his vision of reform in religious services at the Makor Rishon International Diaspora Conference. All this is a

clear reminder that the issues surrounding religion and state play a central role in the present government's agenda.



To:

Mr. Isaac Herzog, President

MK Naftali Bennett, Prime Minister

MK Yair Lapid, Alternate Prime Minister of Israel and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Minister Matan Kahana, Minister of Religious Services

Mr. Shalom Shlomo, Cabinet Secretary

Dear Sirs,

Subject: Call for the Prevention of Bloodshed and Immediate Implementation of the "Kotel Agreement"

We, the leadership and leaders of the Masorti movement in Israel and around the world, call on you - our elected officials - to act immediately to implement the outline of the Western Wall Agreement, in accordance with Government Resolution 1075 of 31.01.2016. This is all the more necessary in light of the real threats to the Women of the Wall, who are scheduled to pray tomorrow (Friday, Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5742) as every Rosh Chodesh, at the Western Wall.

The incidents of violence in recent months at the Kotel must be seen as a red flag before more serious incidents of violence and even bloodshed occur.

The violence directed against the Women of the Wall and egalitarian prayers in the Kotel plaza have reached new heights with every passing month. On Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, Siddurim were torn apart by crowds incited to violence and by calls that can only be described as anti-Semitism; On the 9th of Av, the prayers of the streams in the Ezrat Yisrael / Egalitarian section of the Kotel, were interrupted by shouts and incitement by girls and boys who were brought especially to halt the prayers of Jews on this day of fasting for the destruction of the Temples. All of this is in addition to the incitement and the calls of Knesset members from the ultra-Orthodox factions, rabbis and public figures, who have called for harming our members, who only seek to pray in keeping with our custom at the Western Wall, and harm toward MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv.

Please, it is in your power to prevent bloodshed and blasphemy in this place sacred to the entire Jewish people. Announce today the full and immediate implementation of the approved agreement - also accepted by the ultra-Orthodox Knesset members and the Head of Holy sites. Announce, unequivocally, that the Western Wall is not a place for quarrels and violence, that there is no place for harming the Women of the Wall who wish to pray as they have been doing for so many years each month.

Honored officials, we appeal to you - this is not a political matter but a real Matter of Pikuach Nefesh. We call upon you to immediately announced the implementation of the Western Wall Agreement.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal
CEO, USCJ and the Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Mauricio Balter
Executive Director
Masorti & MERCAZ Olami

Rakefet Ginsberg
CEO, Masorti Israel

Rabbi Prof. Bradley Shavit Artson
Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic
Studies and Zacharias Frankel College

Rabbi Prof. David Golinkin
President, The Schechter Institutes, Inc.

Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz
Chancellor, Jewish
Theological Seminary

Rabbi Mikie Goldstein
President, the Rabbinical
Assembly of Israel

Rabbi Ariel Stofenmacher
Rector, Latin American
Rabbinical Seminary

Rabbi Avi Novis-deutsch
Dean, Schechter Rabbinical
Seminary

Rabbi Jennifer Gorman
Executive Director,
MERCAZ-Canada

Rabbi Ellen Wolintz-Fields
Executive Director, Women's League for
Conservative Judaism

Rabbi Irina Gritsevskaya
Executive Director,
Midreshet Schechter

Sarrae G Crane
Executive Director,
MERCAZ USA

Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg
Chief Operating Officer, the Rabbinical Assembly
Chief Program Officer, USCJ

Highlights from last week in the Knesset

The Kotel Resolution – Back on the table

This week the Kotel Resolution (the arrangements for pluralistic prayer at the Western Wall) and the urgency to implement it in line with the compromise reached in 2016, were once again on the public and political agenda. This, following the letter sent by the Israeli and world leaders of



Conservative Movement to the country's President, Prime Minister and Minister of Religious Affairs on the eve of Women of the Wall's Rosh Chodesh Kislev prayers at the Kotel. The Movement's leaders demanded the immediate implementation of the agreement in order to avoid bloodshed during the Women of the Wall's prayers.

The heads of the coalition factions stressed the need to place the agreement back on the government's agenda:

Minister of Finance Avigdor Lieberman (Yisrael Beiteinu):

"The coalition accords contain many agreements that need to be urgently implemented. For us, conversion by municipal rabbis and the Kotel Resolution take priority. We will seek to advance these issues in the coming month."

Minister of Transport Merav Michaeli:

"We complied with the President's request and support his commitment to hold in-depth discussions on how best to fulfil each person's right to freedom of religious expression at the Kotel, which belongs to everyone. I wish to thank MK Gilad Kariv who has dedicated himself to this struggle for many years; I want to thank Minister of Diaspora Affairs Nachman Shai who works tirelessly for the implementation of the clause in the Labor Party's coalition accords relating to the fulfilment of the Kotel Resolution. We are dedicated to these issues without compromising coalition stability."

MK Aryeh Deri (Shas) was on the attack: "Lieberman and Lapid's stated intention to immediately address the harmful Kotel Resolution and the proposed bill to allow conversions not in accordance with the halacha, are nothing less than a declaration of war by the government of Israel on the country's Jewish identity."

Minister of Religious Affairs Matan Kahana (Yamina) referred to the agreement in an interview on Galei Tzahal (Army Radio): "It is important that we reach an agreement identical to the one in 2016. Unfortunately, extremists caused it to be cancelled. There are people in Israel who feed off of discord."

MK Israel Katz (Likud) commented on the Resolution in an interview on the Haredi radio station Kol Berama (affiliated with the ultra-orthodox): "The Kotel Resolution and the kashrut reforms? I feel bad that we have a government who treats Jewish tradition so brutally. There exists a dire threat to the Jewish character of the State of Israel, and this government bears responsibility."

The Makor Rishon and B'nei Akiva Yeshivot and Ulpanot Center Education Conference

During the Makor Rishon Education Conference, the Minister of Religious Affairs Matan Kahana spoke about kashrut reform and the leading trend in religious services in Israel in an interview with journalist Yair Sherki.

“For years, everyone has been too scared to approach this subject and to repair the kashrut system in Israel. I am happy that I have been given the privilege of tackling it,” adding that “there are today over 500 thousand people with Jewish roots who are not Jewish according to the halacha. I think that we have to persuade them to convert in accordance with halacha and become halachic Jews. This is our duty and our responsibility.”



In the Plenum

In the plenum, Minister of Justice Gideon Sa'ar was presented with the bill Penal Law (Amendment) – Gender-related Defacing of Notices which was submitted by Yisrael Beiteinu MKs Yulia Malinovsky, Alex Kushnir and Ivgeny Soba.

MK Yulia Malinovsky: “I have been pushing to advance this bill since the 20th Knesset. We think this is a shameful practice and every MK should oppose it whether they are religious or secular. I ask for their support for this”.bill

MK Moshe Gafni (United Torah Judaism) voiced his objections: “We are against all offensive acts, not only those that are gender-related. So why this exactly? There are so many offences against various sectors and on other kinds of notices that are defaced. Shame on you.”

The Constitution, Law and Justice Committee

The committee discussed the Rabbinical Jurisdiction Bill – Marriage and Divorce (giving permanent status to temporary provisions) and the Rabbinical Jurisdiction Bill (upholding the rulings on divorce).

During the discussion, the committee chair, MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv (Labor) brought up the subject of *agunot* or “chained” women whose husbands refuse to grant them a divorce:



“We are all committed to ensuring that no woman find herself in a relationship that she does not want, especially in the Jewish state. We are all sensitive to the distress of women – be they citizens or residents. Whoever saves one life, saves the entire world.”

He went on to address the inequality in the rabbinical courts: “We support every aspect of full equality between men and women. Only when a woman will have the power to terminate her marriage to a man may we begin to deal with other matters.”

JPW's Education Desk

Last week, we conducted a seminar for the participants of the Derech Prat Mechina at Kibbutz Sufa where, during two days of fascinating lectures and panel discussions, they were given the opportunity to meet with important influencers and activists in the field of state and religion.

The participants had the pleasure of meeting Rabbi Arie Hasit and Maor Albeck of Mavo Satum for a discussion on marriage and divorce. We were delighted to welcome Yehuda Zeiderman – the Director of Kashrut at the Tzohar rabbinical organization who gave a lecture on kashrut reform and social initiatives. Their meetings with Tammy Gottlieb, Deputy Chair of Women of the Wall, and Dr. Yizhar Hess, the Deputy and Vice Chairman of the World Zionist Organization, broadened the participants' perspective on Jewish pluralism and gave them an insight into the various streams in Judaism. Katya Kupchik, one of the founders of Generation 1.5 and a member of Yisrael Hofsheet (Be Free Israel) brought the seminar to a stirring close with a riveting account of her own personal story.



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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