

**Minister Limor Livnat, M.K.**

**Minister of Education, Culture and Sports  
Of the State of Israel**

Madame Chairperson,

Congratulations on your chairing of this session,

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 ensured ". . . complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or sex . .

Israel is proud to be among those nations where gender equality is a pillar of democracy. Although not all issues have been resolved, we have ensured gender equality under the law. Women from across our entire political spectrum have made significant contributions to our society as ministers, as members of our parliament, and as Supreme Court justices.

The year 1992 marked the start of a decade of intensive feminist legislation. I was among those who initiated the parliamentary Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women, and was honored to chair the Committee, in rotation with a female colleague from the opposition.

Our efforts focused on issues like equal pay for equal work, domestic violence, the rights of single mothers, and maternity leave. Israel's legislation concerning sexual harassment of women is among the most progressive in the world. In 1994, the High Court ruled that equality could only be achieved through *affirmative action*. But laws alone cannot ensure gender equality. Education is no less important. At my Ministry, we seek to instill in our children democratic values, such as the equality of women.

Our democratic roots go back to Biblical teachings, to Jewish life over the centuries, and to the principles of the Zionist movement. Having suffered from anti-Semitism and survived the Holocaust, we were determined that *our State* would be based on democratic, humanitarian and moral values. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, and despite adversity, we have enjoyed a vibrant and robust democratic way of life.

We believe that the spread of democracy would benefit the entire Middle East and would be an anchor of peace. Much of the world's attention has been riveted on the conflict in our region. But a close look at Israeli society clearly shows that there is much more to us than the scenes you see daily in the media.

As we value our heritage, so do we value our accomplishments. Our hi-tech industry, our scientists, writers and artists are our national treasures. Israel's share in the number of scientific articles published in the world has maintained a steady state of approximately 1%. We rank third in the world for the number of articles published per capita, and first for the average number of citations per article in the fields of computer science and research in bi-medicine, chemistry and physics.

Last year, two Israelis, Professor Avram Hershko and Professor Aaron Ciechanover, won the Nobel Prize for chemistry. I look forward to the day – and soon! – when an Israeli woman wins a Nobel prize. Unfortunately, millions of women worldwide are denied the opportunity to reach their potential.

In the spirit of the Beijing Platform of Action and under MASHAV, Israel's international cooperation program, 4,000 women from 123 countries have taken economic and social empowerment courses *in Israel*.

Madame Chairperson,

For too many years, the Middle East has been an arena of conflict. My country has been compelled to defend itself and protect its citizens from terrorist atrocities. Although this is our *history*, it need not be our *future*. Just as Israel has overcome adversity and progressed, so can the entire region.

The recent summit in Sharm al-Sheikh between Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and our Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was encouraging. We believe the opportunity exists to achieve cooperation, peace and a brighter future for the Middle East.

Israel is determined to do what it can to sustain this hope. Backed by our parliament, our government's decision to carry out the disengagement plan shows our commitment to peace and security. Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas must demonstrate his commitment as well. Following last Friday's suicide bombing in a Tel Aviv club, we expect him to take decisive action to eradicate terrorism.

Peace can be advanced by our leaders and by the people of our nations as well. It might have more of a chance, if placed in the hands of women. We stand ready to encourage dialogues between Israeli and Arab women. I call on Zahira Kamal, the Palestinian Minister of Women's Affairs, to join me in finding the path to cooperation.

Madame Chairperson,

Feminism is one of the most profound revolutions in history. It advances and is advanced by freedom, democracy and peace.

All humanity benefits from feminism. That is what this session of the Commission is all about.

That is what we will promote.

**Thank you.**