

# ISRAEL

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

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**Statement by**

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“Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of  
women”

During the 52nd Session of the  
Commission on the Status of Women

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your able stewardship of the Commission on the Status of Women, and thank you for all your efforts. My delegation also wishes to commend the Division for the Advancement of Women for its work in preparation of this session.

Mr. Chairman,

The State of Israel is committed to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women as a basic human right, and as an effective tool to combat poverty, hunger and disease, and stimulate sustainable development. Israel supported the outcome document of the 2000 Millennium Summit, and reaffirmed those commitments during the 2005 World Summit. Similarly, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action continues to shape Israel's approach to the advancement of women, and we share its conclusions that funding, in particular, must be identified and mobilized from all sources and across all sectors in order to meet our collective commitments.

In this respect, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women", E/CN.6/2008/2, and supports its call for gender mainstreaming in economic policies and public finance management. As gender equality makes good economic sense, a gender perspective needs to be incorporated into the design, development, adoption, and execution of budgetary processes.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the last decade, public awareness and efforts to advance the status of women in Israel have greatly increased, and a number of frameworks have been established to vigorously place the discussion of the advancement of women at the head of the national agenda. It is important to note that the advancement of the status of women is seen in Israel as a universal issue of equality and human rights, receiving widespread support and attention -- and not just an issue of feminist concern.

While the Government of Israel finances various gender equality mechanisms, this afternoon I wish to mention three major ones: the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, situated within the Prime Minister's office, the Knesset (parliamentary) Committee on the Status of Women, and the newly created Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which I am honoured to serve as its first commissioner. The Authority publishes a comprehensive guide on women's rights, sponsors research, generates new knowledge, and enforces the appointment of a gender advisor to the mayor in every city, council, and town in Israel. The Knesset Committee serves as a platform for discussion, drafting legislation, and parliamentary supervision. And the Commission, which is part of the Israeli Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labour, acts as an ombudsman in cases of workplace discrimination against women and minority groups, and has the authority to investigate complaints of discrimination based on gender,

religion, nationality, age and sexual preference, and bring legal action against employers who violate anti-discrimination laws. The Commission has helped to strengthen workers and increase the enforcement of labour laws.

In Israel, domestic legislation guarantees equality for women and offers protection for specific circumstances, such as pregnancy and maternity leave, in the workplace. Legislation mandating affirmative action, especially in public tenders and public directories, is being implemented with increasing success. Gender perspectives, especially those focused on gender-differences, are increasingly becoming part of the regular social and political discourse.

Yet, as is the case in other developed and developing nations, implementation remains uneven and existing social norms can obstruct progress. For example, women earn roughly between 82 to 84 percent of what men earn. Hence, advocacy efforts must focus on encouraging judicial activism, enforcing existing legislation, and changing social norms.

Even when legal instruments guarantee equality for women in the workplace, national budgetary strategies – such as those that call for reducing expenditures – can often be disadvantageous to women and can affect employment, salary, and promotion opportunities. For many Israeli women, the public sector is the ticket to the labour market: nearly half of working women in Israel are employed by public services. And when the government cuts services, women are affected not only as workers but also as clients – as in most families, it is the women who come into contact with the public services – schools, health services, and social welfare services. Unfortunately, the effects of such economic policies on women are not always considered.

Mr. Chairman,

Successful financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women is dependent on the implementation and monitoring of the state systems for gender equality. In this regard, civil society in Israel plays a crucial part. Women NGOs in Israel have undertaken enormously important roles in capacity building for women's development, empowerment, and gender-equity, as well as monitoring of state systems. Over 200 such non-governmental organizations exist, and many of these organizations work specifically with Arab-Israeli women and other minorities.

Later this session, the Commission will evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding”, adopted during the CSW-48 in 2004. Israel believes that the mainstreaming of gender into all policies and programmes at the international and national level plays a crucial factor in the promotion of gender equality, as well as the prevention of sexual discrimination, exploitation, and abuse.

If women are ever to truly see their needs recognized and interests represented in peace accords, they must have access to negotiations from the earliest possible stages. Hence, Israel has been working, through government and non-governmental channels, to increase awareness and amplify the voice of women in peace negotiations and conflict resolution. The Israeli Women's Equal Rights law was amended in past years, in the spirit of resolution 1325, mandating that the Israeli government include women in any group appointed to peace-building negotiations and conflict resolution.

I wish to note that this commitment is not merely in theory – but also in practice. Ms. Tzipi Livni, our Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, today leads the peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Lastly, as a former emerging economy now on track to join the OECD, Israel recognizes the importance of broadened horizons in economic development and specifically gender equality and women's empowerment. My delegation wishes to note in the context of this session, however, that gender equality focused aid has dropped among some members in recent years. Additionally, little is known about how much spending by multilaterals is focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. This information could become increasingly important over the next few years, as multilaterals receive more aid from donors, and as donors try to deliver on their Monterrey commitments and increase their investments in gender equality and women's empowerment.

Similarly, on the development front, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through MASHAV – the Centre for International Cooperation – has sponsored a series of seminars carried out at the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC) in Haifa, focusing on capacity building for gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in developing nations.

Mr. Chairman,

While considerable work remains to be done, the opportunities for women in Israel have steadily improved over the years. The State has pledged itself to increasing opportunities for and empowerment of women. With Israel's achievements in raising awareness, on the one hand, and the diverse activities for the advancement of the status of women carried out in cooperation with government and non-governmental organizations, on the other hand, we hope to soon see the complete realization of equal opportunities for all – men and women alike.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.