

# ISRAEL

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

---

Check Against Delivery

---

**Statement by**

**Ms. Mazal Renford**

**Director**

**The Golda Meir Mount Carmel**

**International Training Center**

“The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”

During the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the  
Commission on the Status of Women

United Nations, New York  
6 March 2009

PERMANENT MISSION OF ISRAEL  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
800 Second Avenue, 15th Floor  
New York, NY 10017



Tel: 212-499-5510  
Fax: 212-499-5515  
info-un@newyork.mfa.gov.il  
<http://www.israel-un.org>



Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to thank you for your stewardship of this session. My delegation also wishes to commend the Division for the Advancement of Women for its work in preparation of this session and its ongoing efforts to promote women's equality.

Mr. Chairman,

The State of Israel is pleased that this session is considering as its priority theme "the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS." The increased feminization of HIV/AIDS makes this topic particularly relevant to the Commission. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, about 60% of adults living with the disease are women, and, as the Secretary-General's report on the subject points out, women and girls provide up to 90 percent of the care generated by the illness worldwide.

The reasons behind these disparities are complex, and include tradition, and legal, social and economic discrimination. The approaches to addressing these issues must be equally wide-ranging. To tackle inequities stemming from economic and social status, empowering strategies should include employment creation and assisting entrepreneurship.

In the area of HIV/AIDS prevention, women often lack the knowledge and power to insist on safe sexual practices. Their status and vulnerability is aggravated by poverty, conflict, migration, and the unraveling of their social and family structure. Meaningful health education programmes, along with economic and legal empowerment can go far in protecting women and helping them assert themselves and their rights. For those living with HIV/AIDS, civil society and government should support education campaigns aimed at reducing the stigma attached to the disease.

Mr. Chairman,

Although the principle of equality is enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, and it has a record of significant female figures in government, the State has taken this principle to a higher level in the past two decades through its active promotion at all levels of Government. I wish to mention three mechanisms that are key to Israel's efforts to achieve gender parity: the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women, and the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which acts as an ombudsman in cases of workplace discrimination against women and minority groups. The Commission has the authority to investigate and prosecute cases of discrimination.

Just two months ago a law came into force that requires a gender impact assessment for all proposed legislation. This mandated analysis is based on the rationale that every policy affects men and women differently because of the different roles they fill in society, their unequal access to power, and their ability to influence the government budget.

A recent labour law allows for both parents to share parental leave. Additional legislation gives financial incentives for hiring women and promoting female employees to senior management positions. There is a similar policy of affirmative action in the civil service, where women account for a disproportionately large number of workers. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women is currently evaluating the possibility of adopting a broad range of measures promoting a family-friendly workplace in the public sector. These laws and policies reflect the social understanding regarding shared responsibilities within the family, and the need to balance a career with family commitments.

Shared responsibility in the family begins with educating children from a young age. Working for the long-term, Israel's Education Ministry has established a unit that directs school programmes for teaching gender equality and addressing gender stereotypes.

Israel also takes a bold approach to gender equality in the focused area of promoting shared caregiving worldwide. MASHAV, a branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established to provide aid to the developing world, promotes the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men as an integral part of its training programmes. These programmes emphasize building women's capacity through access to education, information, and financial and health services. The beneficiaries of the training are professionals from around the globe, working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

MASHAV offers programmes that address the feminization of HIV/AIDS and caregiving in the context of the disease. Courses to train professionals include 'Education for Sexual Health and Prevention of AIDS among Adolescents' and 'Care and Support of Children Affected by HIV/AIDS', the latter in cooperation with the UNICEF regional office for western and central Africa.

From our experience we have also learned the importance of bringing men into all programmes dealing with social change and economic development, thus helping them to understand their role in the equal sharing of responsibility and becoming agents of change in their own communities.

Mr. Chairman,

The current financial downturn requires us to consider its gender dimensions, particularly regarding women's role as caregivers. Social policies and mechanisms that address women's vulnerability are even more urgently needed in the current climate.

Mr. Chairman,

Armed conflict takes its toll on women from all sides of any dispute. If women are to effectively promote their interests, including in a peaceful settlement, they must have access to negotiations from the earliest possible stages. The Israeli Women's Equal Rights law has been amended, in the spirit of resolution 1325, to mandate that the Israeli

Government include women in any group appointed to peace-building negotiations and conflict resolution efforts. Indeed, it is important to ensure that women are an integral part of any negotiation.

Mr. Chairman,

We listened carefully to the statement of the Palestinian Minister for Women's Affairs delivered this week. The situation that exists today is not a good one, either for Palestinian or Israeli women. In the Palestinian statement, we noted the absence of any mention of terrorism or Hamas. The omissions were conspicuous. Her deliberate silence on these issues was regrettable because ongoing terrorism impedes women's progress. Hamas and terrorism are part of reality and *must* be addressed; we cannot ignore them. If there is a forum in which we should find some common ground, this is surely the place.

As Director of the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC), I have been working with our Palestinian neighbors for years to enhance knowledge and skills in a number of practical areas. The Center's programmes have included workshops in managing microenterprises, and a conference on women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These exchanges have been very productive and they are continuing. I extend my hand to anyone here who would like to explore what we can do jointly.

In conclusion, women and men will share responsibilities equally only when government policies and programmes address the structural causes of inequality and focus on empowering women and girls, both socially and economically. This is not a matter of cultural prerogatives; it is, instead, a conscious choice about the rights and opportunities made available to women. We also fully realize the special threat that HIV/AIDS poses to women. Combating this threat involves much more than improving women's health conditions. For as long as women are discriminated against and cultural and legal barriers constrain their choices, they will remain vulnerable.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

