



Advocacy Update

Sent July 27, 2011

Q & A – Social Justice at WRJ

Sisterhood questions occasionally come up about the basis for WRJ social justice efforts. Responses to some recent questions follow.

Why does WRJ become involved in social justice programs and advocacy?

WRJ's mandate for social justice advocacy and programs has three foundations: the values of our tradition, the WRJ constitution, and its resolutions.

The Jewish call for justice begins very early in the Torah: Abraham urges God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and pleads "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly" (Genesis 18:25). Statements throughout our texts call on us to fulfill the spiritual mandate of tikkun olam, helping to repair the world. Isaiah's beautiful and powerful words clearly state this mandate:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen:
to unlock the shackles of injustice...
to let the oppressed go free...?
Surely it is to share your bread with the hungry,
and to bring the homeless poor into your house. (58:6-7)

WRJ works on social justice issues because of who we are – Jewish women deeply committed to the values of Judaism. But our work is also enabled by the WRJ Constitution, originally adopted in 1915, which calls on WRJ to "serve Jewish and humanitarian causes." The specific issues on which WRJ is enabled to take public positions are outlined in the resolutions, which have been voted on and passed by assembly delegates and sometimes amplified in statements by the WRJ Board of Directors or the Executive Committee.

As a women's organization, why doesn't WRJ dedicate its advocacy solely to women's and children's concerns?

Women and children together make up more than half of the world's population. Hence, every issue on which we work has an impact on women and children. For example, the lives of impoverished mothers and children would be devastated by cuts to Medicaid, food stamps, child care, and education, while elderly women subsisting entirely on social security would also be severely impacted by cuts to their safety net. Medicare provides health care for sixty million elderly people, a significant proportion of whom are women and people with disabilities.

Does WRJ have partners in its advocacy campaigns?

When working on fulfilling the mandate of tikkun olam, WRJ and its affiliates most frequently do so as part of broad coalitions of not-for-profit organizations. We work very closely with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, but also with other civic organizations: Jewish organizations on immigration issues and disaster relief; interfaith coalitions on a broad range of social justice issues, including reproductive health, separation of church and state, pay equity, poverty, and hunger: as well as with single

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issue coalitions on discrimination, health care and education.

Why does WRJ call on sisterhoods and sisterhood members in its advocacy efforts?

Advocacy efforts are as strong as the numbers of voices that speak up on the issues involved. As we say, we are “stronger together,” we use our strength to advance WRJ’s positions on social justice issues.

Your sisterhood and its members may not agree with WRJ's stands on some issues, positions and advocacy recommendations that are based on the resolutions our organization has adopted. If so, you do not need to take public action. But we do ask you, as leaders, to circulate and discuss our alerts, inform your members about the issues involved, and join with us in speaking out on those with which you agree.

Rabbi Tarfon tells us in PirkeAvot,

The day is short, the task is great...
and the master is insistent.
You are not required to complete the task,
yet you are not free to withdraw from it.

East African Famine Relief

East Africa is experiencing the worst drought in fifty years resulting in a desperate need for food and water. Famine is devastating the people of two regions in Somalia. Approximately 600,000 Somalis have fled to neighboring countries.

The Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief (JCDR), a coming together of organizations to provide a united Jewish response to humanitarian disasters, has established a coordinating group to respond to the drought and consequent famine.