



Advocacy Update

Sent June 20, 2012

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon releases message on Elder Abuse, declares June 15th Annual Elder Abuse Awareness Day

R. Simeon b. Yohai said, "...the most difficult of all mitzvot is 'Honor your father and your mother....'" (Tanhuma Ekev, 2). Jewish tradition teaches us that to save a life is to save the world. It does not qualify the life by age.

Women of Reform Judaism has a long history of concern for the protection of women and girls against all forms of violence and abuse. We have passed resolutions on the topic dating back to 1973.

In 2009 WRJ passed a Resolution on the topic of [Elder Abuse](#) from which the above quotation was taken and which gives strong background material.

We also have a long history of supporting the work of the United Nations that affirms and supports our resolutions. On the week of June 10, 2012, the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, issued a statement announcing the General Assembly resolution naming June 15 as Annual Elder Abuse Awareness Day:

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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY
15 June 2012

The World Health Organization estimates that between 4 and 6 per cent of older persons worldwide have suffered from a form of elder abuse -- physical, emotional, financial. Furthermore, emerging research suggests that abuse, neglect and violence against older persons, both at home and in institutions, are much more prevalent than currently acknowledged.

Such abuse is an unacceptable attack on human dignity and human rights. Making matters even worse, cases often remain unreported and unaddressed.

Alarmed at this widening problem, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, a new observance to be marked annually on 15 June.

Respect for elders is an integral part of many societies. As people live longer, and as we strive for sustainable and inclusive development, it is time to revive and expand our appreciation for those who have advanced in years. A modern civilization can only live up to that name if it preserves the tradition of honouring, respecting and protecting society's elders.

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

As we commemorate the Day for the first time, let us all join in reaffirming that the human rights of older persons are as absolute as those of all human beings.

I call upon Governments and all concerned actors to design and carry out more effective prevention strategies and stronger laws and policies to address all aspects of elder abuse. Let us work together to optimize living conditions for older persons and enable them to make the greatest possible contribution to our world.

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In light of WRJ's existing policy and support of the UN, we hope that Sisterhoods will mark this date in their calendars for future years and consider programming around this issue. The call to action of the WRJ resolution provides helpful suggestions:

1. Present programs to educate congregations and communities about the signs of elder abuse and the importance of breaking down the barriers that prevent some elders from living safe and healthy lives,
2. Work with community coalitions to develop respite care programs for family caregivers, which would alleviate some of the emotional and physical burdens of eldercare, resulting in better care for the elder and better health for the caregiver,
3. Encourage sisterhoods and congregations to assist in accessing, evaluating, and monitoring the quality of home, community-based, and institutional care,
4. Call for awareness within the medical community to be alert to signs of potential abuse and to intervene when necessary,
5. Assist efforts to make existing women's shelters accessible for abused older women with physical and cognitive disabilities, and
6. Support legislation and campaigns to establish needed definitions, strategies, and programs to protect elders from abuse and provide the means to respond when necessary.