

WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM GUIDE FOR ADVOCACY AND ACTION, MAY 21, 2004

Following lively discussion, delegates to the 44th WRJ Assembly adopted the resolutions *Global Issues*, *HIV AIDS: A Worldwide Tragedy*, *Israel Advocacy*, and *Stem Cell Research: Therapeutic Cloning*. The WRJ Board of Directors and Executive Committee deliberate about issues that come up between Assemblies and also adopt needed resolutions or statements. This *Guide for Advocacy and Action* provides recommendations to help your sisterhood act on the following resolutions and statements, adopted since May 2002.

- [Conflict Diamonds](#)
- [The Environment and Children's Health](#)
- [Transgender and Bisexual Rights](#)
- [Global Issues: Rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq and Responding to the Economic Crisis in the Argentine Jewish Community](#)
- [Stem Cells, Gene Therapy, and Cloning/ Stem Cell Research: Therapeutic Cloning](#)
- [HIV/AIDS: A Worldwide Tragedy](#)
- [Israel Advocacy](#)
- [Judicial Nominations and Executive Branch Appointments](#)

WRJ resolutions, grounded in Jewish values, are the basis for our critical issues action, advocacy, and community services. New resolutions often expand the coverage of previous years.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS

Use this guide in conjunction with the current resolutions and statement. It begins with advocacy recommendations that apply to all the resolutions, followed by specific programming recommendations targeted to each resolution or statement..

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Devote a few moments at each board meeting to review and discuss one current WRJ resolution.
- Prepare bulletin articles on the issues, using materials sent with WRJ alerts.
- Urge the program committee to hold a meeting on the resolutions, with emphasis on WRJ positions on hot issues, in order to develop ideas for sisterhood membership meetings and study sessions.
- When holding programs, provide speakers with relevant resolutions and other WRJ resources on the subject. Introduce the program by providing information about WRJ's interest in the subject and action taken by WRJ and your sisterhood.
- Establish a critical issues committee.
- Develop community service projects that respond to the issues delineated in the resolutions.

ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

The status of legislative and administrative proposals can change from week to week, even day to day.

- Follow weekly news magazines and the local newspapers as useful sources of information about issues on the federal and local agendas.
- Keep clipping files with information on issues for writing letters or calling your legislators.
- Participate in community coalitions that support positions taken by WRJ.

- Provide sample letters and language to sisterhood members for letters and telephone calls to appropriate officials.
- Since 9/11 and the anthrax incidents, it has been more efficient to call, FAX or e-mail your legislators. Contact information can be obtained at the websites for the [House](#) and [Senate](#).
- Respond quickly to WRJ, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) and Canadian Council for Reform Judaism (CCRJ) action alerts.

RESOURCES: YOUR TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY

All WRJ resources are available through the [WRJ website](#).

- [WRJ Resolutions and statements](#) adopted since 1915.
- [About Social Justice at WRJ](#), discusses WRJ’s views on various issues and historical involvement.
- [Or Ami “Light of My People” Award for Excellence in Sisterhood Programming](#), includes brief descriptions of outstanding sisterhood programs that are excellent models for replication.
- The [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism \(RAC\)](#), maintains a comprehensive website on the issues.
- The [URJ Canadian Council for Reform Judaism](#), National Social Action Committee, is an excellent resource on Canadian issues.

SOME IMPORTANT ADVOCACY INFORMATION

Call your members of Congress through the Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121. The White House can be reached at 202.456.1111. Addresses for Senators and Representatives follow, but as noted above, it has been more efficient to send your letter by fax or e-mail.

TO A SENATOR:

The Honorable (Full Name)
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name):

Sincerely yours,
 (your name, include address)

TO A REPRESENTATIVE:

The Honorable (Full Name)
 United States House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (last name):

Sincerely yours,
 (your name, include address)

TO WRITE TO THE PRESIDENT:

The President
 The White House
 Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Very respectfully yours,
 (your name, include address on the letter)

PROGRAMMING SUGGESTIONS: SPECIFIC RESOLUTIONS OR STATEMENTS

CONFLICT DIAMONDS – BOARD OF DIRECTORS STATEMENT, 2002

On the basis of longstanding resolutions and advocacy on human rights, WRJ urges that action be taken to prevent the importation of illegal diamonds, also called “conflict diamonds,” into the United States. The proceeds from these diamonds finance civil strife in Africa, causing slaughter, mutilation, rape and sexual slavery of thousands of innocent men, women, and children. WRJ urges the United States administration to endorse the Kimberly international diamond certification system and the United States Congress to pass the Clean Diamond Act.

Update: On April 28, 2003, President George W. Bush signed the Clean Diamond Trade Act into law. In January 2004 the Jewelers of America (JA) formally adopted the Supplier Code of Conduct, supporting its commitment to develop a framework for social, ethical and environmental responsibility. It requires suppliers not to deal in conflict diamonds and to comply by the rules of the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme.

Programming

- Plan a study session on the impact of conflict diamonds on African communities, inviting a political science or African studies academic from a local university as the speaker. Ask your rabbi to discuss what the Jewish tradition says about forcing people into slavery or about maiming, raping or killing people as a way to strike mortal fear into those not harmed.
- Hold a program, inviting a local jeweler who is a member of the Jewelers of America to speak on the issue of conflict diamonds. Suggest discussion of the Clean Diamond Act and how to insure that diamonds purchased are legal – or “clean.” The [Global Policy Forum website](#) provides a comprehensive picture of this tragic issue – with many useful articles.
- Urge members to buy only certified diamonds.

STEM CELLS GENE THERAPY AND CLONING: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STATEMENT, 2002

WRJ calls for research using both adult and embryonic stem cells, research and funding of somatic gene therapy, and therapeutic cloning. WRJ also urges sisterhoods to study and educate themselves on these issues. Action materials for this statement are covered in conjunction with the 44th Assembly resolution Stem Cell Research: Therapeutic Cloning, 2003.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND CHILDREN’S HEALTH – BOARD OF DIRECTORS STATEMENT, 2003

This statement reiterates WRJ’s 2001 commitment to protect children’s health by ridding the environment of pollutants and to reach out to sisterhoods throughout North America with publicity and material that can be used for programs. It encourages sisterhoods to work on this effort with interreligious coalitions.

Programming and Advocacy

- Hold a program for sisterhood and congregation members about the dangers to children’s health caused by toxic materials in homes, schools, or in the outside environment. Invite an expert speaker from one of the following:

- [Children's Environmental Health Network](#), which focuses entirely on this issue and has a wealth of information; and
- [Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life](#).
- Encourage your local interreligious coalition to plan a program on children's health and the environment. Invite local clergy and knowledgeable speakers.
- Become part of community campaigns and coalition efforts to inform and empower families, parent groups and the public and to develop local and statewide initiatives to reduce developmental toxins in the environment.
- Respond to WRJ and other alerts to advocate children's environmental legislation, calling for research and protection of children's health as urgent priorities for the national policy agenda.

TRANSGENDER AND BISEXUAL RIGHTS – BOARD OF DIRECTORS STATEMENT, 2003

Expanding on its 1991 resolution *The Rights of Gay Men and Lesbian Women*, WRJ calls for civil rights protection from all forms of discrimination against bisexual and transgender individuals and calls upon sisterhoods to educate their members about the transgender and bisexual communities (see).

Programming and Advocacy

- Sponsor a program with the congregation, on the specific issues faced by transgender and bisexual individuals. Contact a [Lambda Legal](#) or a [National Center for Transgender Equality](#) office for speakers.
- Sponsor a sisterhood program on appreciating human diversity. Ask people to identify one or more incidents in which they felt discriminated against. Ask them to attach emotions to these incidents. Then introduce the issue of rights for transgender and bisexual rights.
- Ask your rabbi to give a sermon on “differently-gendered” populations. What has been the historical Jewish approach? What is the contemporary liberal Jewish attitude? Ask if the sermon can be followed by a discussion during the *Oneg Shabbat*.

GLOBAL ISSUES – WRJ 44 TH ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION, 2003

WRJ calls on sisterhoods worldwide to urge their governments to support the rebuilding of Afghanistan and Iraq. Specified are the reconstruction of urban and rural communities, the return of refugees, the removal of deadly land mines, and the empowerment and active participation of women in every aspect of rebuilding.

The Jewish community in Argentina is experiencing massive poverty, with 60,000 Jews now living below the poverty line. WRJ urges affiliates worldwide to keep members up to date about the situation in Argentina and to work in coordination with World Union for Progressive Judaism and the Progressive Movement in Argentina to address the needs of this community.

Programming and Advocacy

- Respond quickly to alerts issued by WRJ and other like-minded organizations.
- Sponsor a program on the role of women in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other Muslim countries. A local university or mosque could be a good source for speakers.
- Hold a program on United Nations action concerning rebuilding of Afghanistan and Iraq.

- Set up an event on the Jews of Latin America, with a focus on Argentina. To find resources and speakers who have participated in World Union programs in Argentina and Brazil, contact the [World Union for Progressive Judaism](#).

HIV/AIDS: A WORLDWIDE TRAGEDY – WRJ 44th ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

WRJ calls on its affiliates to encourage governmental endorsement of comprehensive and balanced sexuality education programs worldwide and to advocate adequate funding for the Global Fund to Combat AIDS, TB, and Malaria. WRJ also urges its affiliates to educate health care workers about HIV in aging populations and to sponsor programs for their sisterhoods, congregations, and communities that deal with the health and sexuality of the aging.

Programming and Advocacy

- Give a program for the congregation and community on HIV/AIDS in Africa. You can look for information about speakers at local universities, major medical centers or the [American Jewish World Service](#). AJWS supports the efforts of local groups of people living with HIV who are developing effective and new approaches to limit the spread and mitigate the community impact of HIV/AIDS. Some additional websites with information on HIV/AIDS include:
 - [UN AIDS](#)
 - [UNICEF: Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS](#)
- Hold a sisterhood program on HIV/AIDS in women over 50 years of age, asking a woman gynecologist, well versed in HIV/AIDS, to speak on the specific health issues and body changes which make older women more susceptible to HIV/AIDS and the symptoms that may be indicative of an infection.
- Ask a temple member who is a social worker to lead a sisterhood workshop entitled “Back in the Dating Game.” Include sexual behavior as one element. Discuss the need for different types of protection, even when birth control is not the goal. “[The Body: The Complete HIV/AIDS Resource](#)” is a useful website.

ISRAEL ADVOCACY – WRJ 44th ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

Continuing its ongoing strong support for the State of Israel, WRJ calls for advocacy reaffirming Israel’s right to exist within peaceful borders and supporting a two-state solution. WRJ also calls on its affiliates worldwide to develop programs to strengthen their members’ relationship to Israel, undertake a program of advocacy for the State of Israel in local communities, and educate high school, and college students, as well as young adults, to be effective advocates for Israel on campuses and in the workplace.

Programming and Advocacy

- Publicize WRJ stands on Israel in the sisterhood, congregation and at meetings in the larger Jewish community.
- Invite a speaker to discuss not only the current situation in Israel, but also the history of the State. Contact [ARZA](#) for suggestions.
- Provide ongoing updates for your members of important events concerning Israel, in your bulletin or to your members via email. The [URJ website on Israel](#) and that of [ARZA](#) are excellent sources for information.

- Sponsor a *shouk*, where Israeli-made products are displayed and sold. Include Dead Sea cosmetic products, Israeli music tapes or CDs, books about Israel for children and adults, and lists of local sources for other Israeli products. Provide Israeli style food and music.
- Suggest to your TYG leaders that they include programming on Israel: [NFTY](#) has a wealth of current resources on Israel.

***STEM CELL RESEARCH: THERAPEUTIC CLONING – WRJ 44th ASSEMBLY
RESOLUTION***

WRJ calls upon its affiliates to urge legislation and policies that fund research on both embryonic and adult stem cells, somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) technology for therapeutic cloning, and somatic gene therapy. WRJ also calls on sisterhoods to promote informed dialogue and study regarding the ethical, social and theological implications of reproductive cloning and to hold educational programs that explore the complex issues of the genetic revolution within a framework of Jewish values.

Programming and Advocacy

- Hold a program on stem cell research with a speaker knowledgeable about bioethics. Call the Department on Jewish Family Concerns (212.650.4294) for help in locating someone to lead the program.
- Request your rabbi to give a sermon on the Jewish view of stem cell research and urge that the positions taken in the WRJ and URJ resolutions be included.
- Present a panel discussion on stem cell research. Invite a bioethicist, a researcher working on stem cells at a local medical center, and your rabbi. Ask the panelists to include discussion on the potential for stem cell research and cloning to either cure or prevent now intractable diseases.

***JUDICIAL AND EXECUTIVE BRANCH NOMINATIONS – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
RESOLUTION, 2004***

Holding that an impartial, balanced, and independent judiciary is essential to American democracy, WRJ adopted a procedure based on clear standards by which the organization would support or oppose judicial nominations and presidential appointments. This resolution does not preclude individual WRJ members from expressing their positions on candidates in their own names.

Advocacy

- Follow the media and take five minutes at sisterhood meetings to keep your members up-to-date on contested appointments.
- Take action quickly in response to WRJ alerts on judicial nominations and administrative appointments.