

Right of Women and Girl Children Worldwide - 2000

When will redemption come? . . .
When we grant to every person the rights we claim for ourselves.
(Gates of Prayer, p. 211)

Women of Reform Judaism has longstanding resolutions on the rights and well being of women and girls. In particular, WRJ has taken strong positions since 1973 against the abuse of women and children. In 1996 WRJ called on its affiliates to urge the US Immigration and Naturalization Service to grant asylum to girls and women fleeing the threat of female genital mutilation and decried child commercial sexual exploitation in 1997. At this time WRJ is concerned about the plight of women and children victimized by sexual trafficking, women under the Taliban and other governments that repress women, and abused women seeking asylum in the United States.

Each year sexual trafficking victimizes approximately two million women and children. Such trafficking is defined as "all acts involved in the recruitment, transport, harboring or sale of persons across international borders through fraud, coercion or force, or debt bondage for purposes of placing persons in situations of forced prostitution or sexual services." Trafficked women are typically acquired by kidnapping, purchasing, or luring through false incentives for jobs and a better life and kept against their will. The sexual slave industry operates throughout the world.

The rise of fundamentalism in some countries has slowed the move toward more advanced rights for women. In the case of Afghanistan such rights have been reversed. Since the Taliban seized control of the government of Afghanistan, women and girls have practically become prisoners in their own homes with no rights or privileges of citizenship, or even access to needed health care. A petition to Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Angela King, Assistant Secretary General - Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, UN, stated that "the government of Afghanistan is waging war on women" and that the current treatment of women in Afghanistan is unacceptable and not to be tolerated. Women are no longer allowed to work or go out in public without a male relative. Estimates by relief workers suggest that depression and suicide among women have increased markedly.

In 1995 the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service issued guidelines intended to recognize gender-based persecution. Recently a foreign woman who fled to the United States from a violent abusive spouse was not granted asylum. Asylum advocates contend the guidelines, erratically interpreted and applied, are not binding on immigration judges and need to be more broadly defined.

In reaffirmation of Women of Reform Judaism resolutions on the rights of women and girl children everywhere, the executive committee calls upon WRJ affiliates worldwide to:

1. Develop programs that will increase awareness of the problems of sexual trafficking,
2. Join with other groups that are offering aid and assistance to victims of sexual trafficking,
3. Encourage prosecution of cases through expansion and enforcement of laws against sexual traffickers and encourage the training of enforcement officials to recognize and act against sexual traffickers and trafficking,
4. Urge their governments to increase economic opportunity and social development for women as part of an effort to prevent sexual trafficking,
5. Inform members about the inhuman treatment of women and girls in some countries controlled by religious extremists,

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6. Write to the appropriate governmental officials as well as their respective ambassadors to the United Nations, requesting that they try to persuade Afghanistan and other repressive countries to change the policies that threaten the human rights and well-being of women and girls,
7. Join coalitions in the campaign already underway to restore the rights of the women and girl children of Afghanistan and other countries in which they have been curtailed.

Moreover, the WRJ Executive Committee urges United States affiliates to contact the appropriate governmental bodies to urge broadly increasing the categories for asylum from persecution.