

In 2005 the Israeli Knesset asserted:

Diverse representation of women in government appointed decision-making bodies is obligatory and will bring about greater gender equality and justice in design of public policy.

In the years since the adoption of this progressive legislation, inspired by UNSCR 1325, the Israeli government has ignored its commitment. The NGO **Itach-Ma'aki** - Women Lawyers for Social Justice has been working toward implementation of this law and greater representation of diverse women in Israeli decision-making bodies, with a focus on women from minority backgrounds.

In response to **Itach-Ma'aki's** July 2010 petition, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the government's long-time disregard of its obligations under the law is unacceptable.

The appointment of public commissions without the participation of any women is a breach of the principles of equality embodied in the law:

"The respondent (the government)... is obligated to act with due diligence toward the appropriate representation of women... The state has not fulfilled this obligation... and it cannot be said that the circumstances of the matter were so exceptional that this requirement was made completely impossible."



In 2005, a revolution of national importance occurred: The Equality for Women's Rights Law was amended, and it was declared that appropriate representation of women from **diverse** population sectors must be included on every governmental team or committee at the national level. This revolution officially recognizes women's unique and critical contributions to policy-making and positions gender status as crucial to all issues. This fundamental legal change was fueled by Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council (enacted in 2000). This resolution asserts that members of the United Nations are obligated to include women in their countries' central decision-making bodies, especially in processes of conflict resolution and the implementation of peace initiatives. This decision recognizes the unique contributions of women in such processes, the distinct impact that conflict situations have on women, the importance of gender considerations to understanding national and international concerns, and the rights of women to participate in decisions which shape their fate and their future in society.

The Knesset was the first legislative body to adopt the U.N.'s Resolution 1325 into law. Israeli lawmakers expanded and reinforced its mandate, obligating the government to include women from diverse population groups **in all** decision-making processes on the national level in order for them to address crucial issues that affect their lives and the lives of all citizens.

Itach-Ma'aki's Advocacy Regarding the Lack of Implementation of the Law

Despite the progressive legislation, the Israeli government has actively disregarded its legal obligations and essentially ignored the law and its principles.

On this backdrop, **Itach-Ma'aki** has made a commitment to work toward the law's genuine implementation and to raise awareness of the important values embedded within it. We are dedicated to the belief that gender perspectives have a unique and critical significance. However, until now, the broad range of women's voices has been almost completely excluded from the public dialogue. Voices of Arab, Jewish, Haredi, Mizrachi, Bedouin, Ethiopian, impoverished and victimized women must be heard!

In our battle for full implementation of the law, **Itach-Ma'aki** has submitted petitions to the Israeli Supreme Court against specific committees that did not include diverse women appointees.

Via the rulings on these cases, the law's interpretation has been clarified and broadened and the government's awareness and recognition of its legal obligations have increased.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the government continues to ignore the law's obligatory demands.



Itach-Ma'aki's 2010 watershed petition to the Supreme Court against the Turkel Committee, along with the Court's criticism of the government's actions, sparked wide-ranging public dialogue about gender perspectives and women's representation in policymaking.

Following the government's appointment of the Turkel Committee for the investigation of the Gaza Flotilla incident with no women appointees, **Itach-Ma'aki** submitted a petition to the Supreme Court against the Committee, highlighting that women's unique, crucial and necessary contributions in the areas of foreign relations and security must be recognized. In its ruling, the Supreme Court stated that the lack of women participants violated the law and that the government did not use reasonable efforts to implement the law's demands. Further, the Supreme Court issued a mandatory injunction against the government demanding that the committee conform to the Supreme Court's ruling. Thus, the Supreme Court sent a clear and unequivocal message to the Israeli government: Lack of representation of diverse women on public bodies will not be tolerated!!

Alongside the demand to include women, there is a legal obligation to include gender analysis in decision-making processes.

A 2007 amendment to the Equality for Women's Rights Law states that future proposals for new legislation must include opinions on the law's effect on gender issues, thereby including an analysis and appreciation of gender perspectives.

On the basis of this law, **Itach-Ma'aki** submitted a document to the Turkel Committee that clearly spells out the government's legal and moral obligations to examine relevant gender-based viewpoints applicable to the issues of the committee's investigation.

We believe that an honest and deep understanding of gender perspectives on legislative initiatives demands thorough analysis and clarification. This includes any process where significant rulings are made, and any subject wherein there will be future influence in the shaping of national policy.

WE HEREBY DECLARE AND DEMAND:

Government of Israel, fulfill your obligations pursuant to the ruling of the Supreme Court to include women from diverse population sectors in national policy design committees and teams. Failure to include such representatives will be seen as a direct violation of the law and of the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling!

Furthermore, it is incumbent upon public bodies and decision-makers at the national level to include an analysis of relevant gender perspectives, such as:

- Gender perspectives regarding peace and security
- Specific gender perspectives on economic issues
- Gender perspectives in planning processes, including implications on the environment
- Inclusion of women's viewpoints in legislative areas such as education, health, welfare and employment

We call on all responsible parties to be aware of the government's illegal behavior regarding the lack of women representatives and the lack of mandated gender perspectives. We call on the public to voice its opposition to this blatant violation of the law and to demand the implementation of decision-making processes which are just, appropriate and inclusive.

Equality for Women Law: The Key for Women's Participation in Decision-Making

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