



Isha L'Isha—Haifa Feminist Center Annual Report 2007

This year, Isha L'Isha celebrates 25 years of feminist activism. This is an opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments in addressing and mobilizing around key societal issues: violence, economy, security, health, trafficking in women, and more. We wish to thank all Isha L'Isha's members—past and present—without whom our activities would have been impossible as well as our sponsors over the years. We are proud of the history of feminist leadership that has evolved from Isha L'Isha's many years of activity, and we hope to build on this legacy of social change in years to come.

Isha L'Isha's 25 years of experience in running grassroots projects has earned a national reputation for professionalism and dedication to feminist causes. Our staff members and activists are frequently invited to participate in coalition and Parliamentary meetings to provide the input, ideas and know-how that result from our experience. We are repeatedly called upon to lecture and comment on social events shaping women's daily lives.

Our **Mission** is to advance the status of all women in Israel by:

- **Empowering** them and encouraging them to become leaders in their communities;
- **Campaigning** for full civil rights and equal opportunities for women;
- **Opposing** all forms of violence and discrimination against women;
- **Developing** and encouraging new projects to address women's needs; and
- **Promoting** collaboration between women's organizations.

Our **Vision** is an Israeli society where all women — regardless of religion, ethnicity, cultural background or sexual preference — enjoy equal rights in all fields, including economic, social, and political; a society without gender-based violence; a society in which women's voices are heard, and in which women have full and equal access.

🔗 *Our Community*

Isha L'Isha is part of a community of women, and operates to serve and empower this population. Community development and fostering leadership among women has been an important focus of ours for many years. **We strive to create a vibrant, empowered community of women in and around Haifa that empowers and enables women to become activists and leaders both in their own local communities as well as on a national level.** Through a range of workshops, lectures and activities, Isha L'Isha provides women with information that they would otherwise not have access to due to social, financial or cultural obstacles. We are committed to helping them utilize this information to achieve personal empowerment and to develop their leadership abilities and skills. In addition, we offer them a safe, supportive environment in which they can voice their needs, providing room for self-expression and development. Isha L'Isha provides a platform to discuss issues of direct importance to women's lives and their communities, such as feminism and women's rights, gender inclusion, sexuality, violence against women, reproductive rights, discrimination in work and society, and sexual identity. We also provide a space for discussion of feminist perspectives on broader issues such as the economy, ecological and environmental issues, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, health care and Judaism. Women have an opportunity to address the unique needs and issues affecting them that are not included in the prevailing social discourse and about which they have no other source of information. During 2007, approximately 2,500 women participated in 75 lectures and workshops offered by Isha L'Isha.

🔗 *Our Members, Activists, & Volunteers*

Isha L'Isha's members, activists and volunteers play a central role in planning and implementing our programs and activities. These women bring enthusiasm and commitment to feminist causes and, in many cases, years of experience. They help ensure Isha L'Isha's constant progress by offering both new and experienced perspectives. They frequently initiate new activities, help organize protests, demonstrations and conferences, and help facilitate our day-to-day operations.

"I am an American student who came to Israel to study and volunteer specifically at Isha L'Isha after reading about the organization in my studies on Israeli feminism in the United States. During my five months in Israel, the women of Isha L'Isha became my family-away-from-home and provided me with meaningful work experience related to causes I embrace. I whole-heartedly support and believe in the mission and goals of Isha L'Isha—these women are doing incredible, ground-breaking work that has an impact on the lives of many women in need."

🔗 *Feminist Library and Archive*

Isha L'Isha houses a feminist library and archive that serves the whole community. Many members of Isha L'Isha, some of whom are scholars, use our feminist library on a regular basis to complement their academic research or to expand their knowledge on feminist issues. In 2007, we began working on expanding the library to a *Women's Historical Collection and Research Center*, in cooperation with Al-Tufula center in Nazareth. Our vision is to record and preserve our achievements, those of individual women and of broader women's movements, our successes and failures, and the long-term contributions made to our communities. We desire to create a "room of our own"—one that will allow us to store personal papers, research materials, and other documents and to enable public use and learning.

🔗 *Bi-monthly Newsletter*

One of our tools for community outreach is our bi-monthly feminist newsletter. Approximately 3,000 copies are printed and distributed to members, activists, and program participants. The newsletter provides a platform for women to write about issues not on the general public agenda that are important to women, as well as to discuss Isha L'Isha's activities and women's issues.

🔗 *Outreach, Media, & Visibility*

In 2007, Isha L'Isha hired, for the first time, a media coordinator. Working with the media includes sending out press releases and facilitating interviews between the press and Isha L'Isha activists. This serves as yet another method of raising awareness and encouraging the discussion of issues not on the public agenda. In addition to working directly with the media, our media coordinator acts as media consultant for women who wish to publish their articles in the various media channels. They consult her regarding where to send their articles, whom to contact, and how to best phrase their opinions so that they get published.

This year we also launched our website, which has been an indispensable tool for visibility and advocacy through which we make our feminist voices heard. It also constitutes an effective outreach tool, as we received many calls from women, men, and media reporters interested in learning more about our activities or attending some of our events. In addition, the website enabled a wide mapping on the internet medium, which in turn made Isha L'Isha's activities accessible to a wider audience. The website is increasingly becoming a source of information on feminist issues both locally and globally.

🌀 Networking, International Activities, & Dissemination

Periodically, Isha L'Isha's activists and staff members are invited to international conferences to share and exchange knowledge and best practices as part of an international networking. This constitutes an important aspect of our work as part of an international community of women's organizations. We also network and create ad-hoc coalitions with local civil society organizations, as we believe that partnerships and joint efforts have greater potential to effect social change.

Projects

🌀 Fighting Against Trafficking in Women 🌀

Isha L'Isha has been on the forefront in the fight against trafficking in women since 2002. The goal of the project is to provide emotional, practical, and legal support for victims of trafficking and to work for the eradication of trafficking in Israel through advocacy and education. We are proud to say that a great deal has been accomplished—police, government and public attitudes towards the victims of trafficking have improved, prosecution of traffickers is more common and sentences are stricter, and the conditions trafficking victims face are better. Mainly because of Isha L'Isha's efforts, there are today far fewer women trafficked into Israel for the sex industry.

Project Achievements

During 2007, Isha L'Isha's project achieved the following:

- Provided in-depth assistance to 49 trafficked women
- Assisted 122 women who left or were not eligible for the government shelter
- Received 460 calls on our anti-trafficking hotline
- Helped 12 trafficking survivor receive court-ordered financial compensation
- Received 15 requests from source-country NGOs to help locate specific women who had been trafficked to Israel
- Assisted 20 survivors to give testimony against their traffickers and pimps, walking them through the often-daunting legal process
- Filed 112 complaints to the police about poor treatment of victims or non-action against brothels and "massage parlors"
- Participated in 15 Parliamentary anti-trafficking committee meetings

→ Expanded Education Project

Educating government officials, police, NGO staff and members, and the general public about trafficking in women has always been a key element of Isha L'Isha's anti-trafficking work. During 2007, we have expanded the educational aspect of our project, adding interactive workshops to lectures on the topic. We are also making an effort to reach out to wider target groups, and have included Arabic speaking volunteers to present to Arab groups throughout the north of Israel. During 2007, Isha L'Isha staff and volunteers held 79 lectures and workshops to a total of 2,510 people, including health care professionals, police officers, consuls, teachers, students, NGOs, and a variety of civil society groups. In these training sessions, we strove to raise awareness of the issue of trafficked women as well as to provide tools for how to best help the women.

→ Client Education Campaign

We created a client campaign flyer in Arabic and Hebrew that our volunteers distribute widely to clients and suspected clients of the sex industry by placing it under car windshields around brothels and by handing it out to men seen entering or leaving the brothels.

The flyer roughly translates as follows:

True, you didn't bring her here and promise her lies; you didn't sell her; you don't live off her money; you don't deny her freedom. But every time you go to an escort service and buy sexual services, you take part in the exploitation and violence that others perpetrate on your behalf.

→ Internet-based Client Education Campaign

Because so many men are now buying sex on the internet, we launched an internet campaign, consisting of a banner that pops up whenever a combination of words related to purchasing sex is entered into the Google search engine.

The banner roughly translates as follows:

*Did you buy sex?
80 percent of what you pay her goes to her pimp
Who forces her to work for you.
You are at least one of 10 men
Who enter her every day, 12 hours a day,
7 days a week.
When you buy sex,
You leave her there
Don't support trafficking in women and prostitution.*



Tell us what you think about it.

At the end of the banner, users have an opportunity to express their opinion anonymously.

→ Cooperation with NGOs in Source Countries

Isha L'Isha provides information and coordination to many NGOs in the FSU on a regular basis. In many cases, we initiate contact with these organizations to exchange knowledge, information, and best practices, and in some cases to coordinate a safe return home for trafficking victims.

→ Cooperation with Foreign Diplomats

Isha L'Isha has been in close contact with foreign diplomats from source countries posted in Israel, government representatives visiting Israel from source countries, and police representatives of consuls from the FSU. We hold many discussions on trends in trafficking with these diplomats and representatives. In many instances, we are approached by them to help locate trafficking victims.

→ "Hear My Voice: Identifying and Assisting Trafficked Persons" International Conference

In the framework of our joint Choosing Freedom project, Isha L'Isha and our partner NGOs, the Hotline for Migrant Workers and the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel organized an international conference on identifying and assisting trafficking victims. Held in cooperation with the Law in Service of the Community–Resource Center of the Law Faculty of Tel Aviv University on March 21-22, the conference brought together over 100 participants, including government officials, Israeli NGOs, and representatives from international organizations, governments, and source countries.

The conference enabled guests to share information in areas of expertise while providing a wide range of thought-provoking topics for participants. Among the topics included were overviews of the situations in other countries, the role of the client, government-NGO relationships, victim identification and rehabilitation, and repatriation.

→ New Project Directions

Although the number of trafficked women to Israel has decreased, the demand for sexual services has not disappeared. The result of the large demand coupled with a reduced number of women trafficked from abroad is an increase in Israeli women who are being forced into prostitution.

While continuing our work fighting against trafficking of foreign women into Israel, we have begun turning our attention to the plight of Israeli women who have fallen victims to sexual exploitation. The aim is to pressure the Israeli government to take notice this

phenomenon and to provide real, systemic solutions to the victims' needs, and to raise awareness among the Israeli public about this issue.

☞ Women, Peace, & Security ☜

In 2007, the Women, Peace, and Security project has undergone an ideological shift. We have been engaged in rethinking and redefining the ideological directions towards which we wish to strive and invest our resources and efforts. In the past few years, our focus has been more on representation of women. We strongly believe that it is not enough to have a woman on a negotiation team, as not every woman brings with her a feminist perspective, and not all women—especially Palestinian women—are willing to participate in negotiation teams on the Israeli side. Thus, after a long process we realized that a feminist interpretation of the resolution befits our ideology, being a feminist center that acts to promote alternative world-views where the needs of women of different national, ethnic, and economic are taken into consideration.

The overall objective of this project is to present new, alternative feminist perspectives to the terms peace and security, which are defined by the military, male hegemony in Israel. These alternative perspectives take into consideration all the various and complex issues pertaining to women. The ultimate aim is instilling an anti-militaristic, gender-sensitive, feminist perspective into society.

Project Activities

→ "Security for Whom?" Alternative Conference on Security

Isha L'Isha and the Coalition of Women for Peace held the second annual Alternative Conference, entitled "*Security for Whom?*" on January 23rd. This conference is the feminist response to the Herzliya Conference on Israel's National Security, which brings together policy makers and leading thinkers to address the key issues that affect Israel's security. Our feminist conference has become a source of knowledge and an alternative stage for civil society, with the aim of exploring the diverse meanings of the term "security" while offering an alternative view about security issues from a feminist perspective. All the presentations in the conference were published in *Security for Whom? Feminist Perspectives on Security*, a tri-lingual book (Arabic, Hebrew, and English).



→ Position Papers

Isha L'Isha issued two position papers in 2007:

1. Palestinian Women Under the Yoke of National and Social Occupation: A Feminist Reading on Racism and Patriarchalism in the Shadow of the Zionist Discourse on Citizenship and Residence and Under The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law.
2. Position Paper on the Civilian Peace Processes—Feminist Perspectives: Civilian Peace Processes versus Government Negotiations.

→ Media Training Course

Recognizing the importance of voicing women's and feminist views in the media, we held a communication training course. The aim of this community-based training was to empower women to make their voices heard regarding their views on the conflict and the ways it affects them by providing training in media skills. The course consisted of six workshops, each focusing on a different aspect of the media. Issues covered in the course included: feminism and the media, difficulties women face in the media, fears of the media, feelings of lack of knowledge, fear of crossing red lines, understanding media frameworks and acquiring tools for working with the media. The participants learned of the importance of voicing their opinions, and the various media channels available for them doing so. The course made the various media channels more accessible to the participants, de-mystified the field for them, and reduced their fears of it. Following the course, a number of the course participants have become active in the media, writing articles and participating in internet forums.

→ Security, Secrecy & Withholding Information

In 2007, we held a variety of lectures and workshops to different audiences—groups of women, men, and civil society actors—on the issue of security and peace, aiming at raising awareness among the civil society and the wider public. Some highlights:

- *"Feminism and Militarism."* A series of three workshops in cooperation with "New Profile." The workshops incorporated an exhibition illustrating the great degree to which militarism has become inherent and normalized in our society.
- *"Feminism and Nuclear Weapons."* Together with Greenpeace and the Coalition of Women for Peace, we hosted a roundtable to address the relevance of feminism to nuclear arms. The aim of the round table was to open up the discussion of the topics brought forth at the alternative conference, expanding them, exploring the various connections between them, as well as possible cooperation between the organizations.
- *"Strategic Threats in the Middle East."* A panel organized in cooperation with the Women's Parliament. Two Isha L'Isha members presented their views on the issue: "Civil Society Faced with the Vagueness of Security," and "Who's Afraid of Nuclear Weapons?" The panel received wide media coverage on the national level.

- *“An Evening on Nuclear Weapons.”* We held an open evening about the connection between feminism and nuclear weapons, where the project coordinator presented materials and facts we collected on the issue thus far. Participants had the opportunity to voice their fears and opinions about the nuclear threat in general, and about Israel’s nuclear policy in particular.

∞ *LEAP Forward: Learning Economic Advancement for
Women of Low Income* ∞

This program provides economic empowerment for women from the lowest economic strata so that they can take control of their finances and break out of the cycle of poverty. The program is implemented in cooperation with Mahut Center, and it enables us to give the women in the project a full range of services. Isha L’Isha provides economic empowerment courses, which teach economic skills, including understanding basic finances, how to prepare a home budget, consolidate debts, control stress and anxiety, know and demand one’s rights, as well as how to join the work force by conducting a job search, interviewing and successfully maintaining employment. The project provides participating women with the knowledge and skills necessary for improving their lives. The program gives these women new opportunities by empowering them to realize that they can achieve their full potential.

One of the root causes of women’s disadvantaged status in society is economic inferiority. This program works to affect broad change by ending that inferiority, thereby giving women a more equal place in society. This is an integral part of Isha L’Isha’s mission to advance women and improve their status in Israeli society. By empowering the women to know and stand up for their rights and providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to feel secure and self-confident, the project develops the women’s leadership potential.

One of the project’s participants, who completed the Economic Empowerment course in February 2007, received a job as a coordinator at a facility for people with mental disabilities. *“I never would have thought I could hold such a job,”* she says. ***“Women who have not worked for a while tend to look for low-income jobs. We set our sights low, because no one ever encouraged us to raise them. But the course did just that for me. I became aware of my own needs for the first time and I learned that it is okay to say ‘This is what I need.’ The job coordinator treated me like a real person, not just another file on her desk, and helped me find my job.”***

❧ Women and Medical Technologies ❧

A group of Isha L'Isha activists began to work on the issue of ova harvesting from "donors." In early May, a law that proposes to allow women who are not undergoing fertility treatment to "donate" their ova for research and fertility purposes passed its first reading in the Knesset. We believe this law will significantly endanger the health of many women, as the process of ova harvesting includes potentially life-threatening medical risks. Moreover, there is an alarming lack of awareness among women regarding the dangers posed by ova harvesting. We are concerned not only about women's health and reproductive rights, but also about the relevance of this issue to organ trafficking. Isha L'Isha is currently developing activities designed to put this issue on the public agenda, emphasizing its feminist aspects. We wrote a position paper that explains the dangers of ova harvesting and lists Isha L'Isha's suggested changes to the proposed legislation. This position paper was distributed in Hebrew to numerous members of the medical and research community in Israel, as well as to members of the government. The position paper was recently expanded into a full report.



❖ Other Activities

- **Conferences:** in 2007, Isha L'Isha organized and participated in conferences, including a conference on Ecology and Breast Cancer (organized by Ahat Mi-Tesha'a and the Coalition for Public Health) and a conference on the Law of Expulsion (in cooperation with the Association for Mixed Families, the Coalition of Women for Peace, Women against Violence, and the Hotline for Migrant Workers).
- **Tofie'e:** Feminist Arab Jewish Theater. After barely surviving the war, only three brave actors remained members of the theatre. In March, they performed the theatrical collage "Mama Mia" which deals with the different meanings of motherhood in our society. The show was performed three times at different locations. In 2008, the theater will become a training workshop for beginning actors with the goal of performing an original piece at the end of the year.

Hadar Happening

A street fair in the Hadar neighbourhood. The event took place with the cooperation of the Hadar Community Center and neighbourhood residents. It included street theater, creative workshops, a flea market, and other activities. This was part of our community involvement activities.



Campaign for Removing Sex Offenders from Positions of Power

Isha L'Isha has been on the forefront of the fight against sex offenders, fighting for their removal from key positions. Together with the Coalition of Women for Peace and 13 other women's organizations, we launched a campaign that was widely covered by the media. The aim of the campaign was to incorporate the term "safety for women" into the public discourse, the media, and women's organizations; to raise public awareness regarding sex offenders in key positions; to spread the fact that sex offenses permeate all layers of society; and to strengthen the cooperation between women's organizations. The campaign was very successful, and women who had been victims of sexual assault had an opportunity to speak for themselves and lead struggles for social change.

For further information, ways you can support or contribute to our work, or to subscribe to our e-mail updates, please contact Khulud Khamis, Isha L'Isha's Resource Development Coordinator, at khulud.kh@gmail.com.

We also invite you to visit our website at www.isha.org.il to learn more about our activities and projects.

