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Rabbis for Religious Freedom & Equality in Israel



“The State of Israel... will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience...”
Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948)

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April 13, 2017
17 Nissan 5777

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Dear Friends,

We are sending just two articles this week, both of them highly thought provoking.

The Pew study indicates the rise in government sponsored and private discriminatory actions and statements against religion in 2015. Clearly, the threat of immigration and other cultural upheavals are creating a surge of publicly expressed intolerance of religion and religious minorities. The more people feel threatened, the less tolerant they become.

The second article indicates two seemingly contradictory trends in Israeli society as expressed in the IDF: greater inclusion of religious Zionist women in active military roles and a rise in the sentiment to

Pew Research Center:

Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion increased in 2015 for the first time in three years, according to Pew Research Center's latest annual study on global restrictions on religion.

The share of countries with “high” or “very high” levels of government restrictions – i.e., laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices – ticked up from 24% in 2014 to 25% in 2015. Meanwhile, the percentage of countries with high or very high levels of social hostilities – i.e., acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society – increased in 2015, from 23% to 27%. Both of these increases follow two years of declines in the percentage of countries with high levels of restrictions on religion by these measures.

When looking at overall levels of restrictions in 2015 – whether resulting from government policies and actions or from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations or social groups – the new

prevent women from holding equal positions in the military. This occurs as the number of eligible males to enlist in the IDF declines due to an increase in the proportion of ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs in the population, neither of which serve in the IDF.

Israel is grappling with how to include Jewish tradition as an element in the official structure of the State, including the military. How can historical Jewish values, traditional religious practices and roles, be included in an entirely modern Jewish state? These are yet to be defined.

We have included these articles for your interest because they indicate the social unrest that roils below the surface, both for Israel and the international community. Clearly our goal in Hiddush and RRFEI is to achieve free exercise of religion so that the government will allow unencumbered religious expression to rejuvenate Jewish life. The goal of a reborn Judaism consistent with modernity was the vision of the Founders of Israel, and every bit as important to Jewish history in the 21st century as it was at the outset of the 20th century.

study finds that 40% of countries had high or very high levels of restrictions, up from 34% in 2014.

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How religious female soldiers are transforming the IDF

AI-Monitor, April 10, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Anyone who has participated in Israel Defense Forces (IDF) activities of late, or even just covered those activities for that matter, will have noticed a growing presence of women in an increasing number of field positions, including combat positions. All around the world, the IDF is seen as a trailblazer. It is perceived as a liberal army, constantly opening new opportunities for women, who volunteer to serve in combat positions.

The air force already has dozens of women pilots and combat navigators. The navy has women serving on missile boats, while a Dvora-class patrol boat has a woman commander. The infantry can boast of four combat battalions made up of women, who serve mainly along Israel's quieter borders, while the Intelligence Corps has a particularly high number of women, including some who serve in challenging field positions. In February, the IDF announced the launch of a pilot program to train all-women tank teams.

While these developments are taking place, there has been a parallel culture war among the different sectors of Israeli society, focusing on what happens in the army. The announcement that the IDF was examining the possibility of incorporating women in the Tank Corps immediately set off a fight, bringing the phenomenon to the public's attention with a loud blast. Rabbi Yigal Levinstein, the head of the Pre-Military Academy in the settlement of Eli, responded with a violent and threatening speech, in which he called on young women from the religious Zionist sector to refuse to enlist in the army at all. In his speech, he claimed that Jewish women who enlist in the IDF come out "non-Jewish."

...

Best wishes for a meaningful Pesah, and the possibility of freedom for the Jewish people and State,

We would love to hear from you at: [organizers@RRFEI.org](mailto:organizers@rrfei.org), or on our Facebook group for Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality.

Chag Sameach,

Mark

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Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel represents a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice, and champions the values of religious freedom and equality fundamental to World Jewry, in partnership with Hiddush for the realization of these principles in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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