

## **Israel Religious Action Center Report 2008- 2009**

### **WRJ YES FUND GRANT REPORT**

#### **Forced Gender Segregation on Public Transportation**

The Mehadrin (kosher) buses, founded in 1998, are regular bus lines run by the state bus company Egged that adhere to strict religious customs of separation between men and women as well as “modest” dress for women (long skirts, no pants, covered sleeves and collar bones, etc). Women must board and sit only in the back of the bus. These buses are not well marked, are often cheaper, and are sometimes the only option for transportation from one city in Israel to the next.

IRAC was approached by Five women who were attacked verbally and/or physically and/or were denied rider ship because they did not adhere to the segregation or modesty rules of the Mehadrin bus line. In January 2008, IRAC presented their case to the Supreme Court. The justices criticized the Ministry of Transportation for their lack of understanding that women are being discriminated against while riding their bus lines and ordered them to form a committee to resolve the issue of the Mehadrin lines. In May, the committee was established. However even here IRAC had to intervene, as the original composition of the committee did not include any women! As directed by the courts, IRAC then presented its case to this committee in November 2008, with three female witnesses testifying to their experience of segregation and violence. IRAC demanded that non-segregated buses be offered in equal frequency as the segregated buses.

In addition, IRAC filed a request for an injunction against the formation of new Mehadrin lines until the Supreme Court case is resolved. We found out that Egged created four new Haredi bus lines in the last three months. The Court did not accept the injunction because the State convinced the Court that these new lines are regular service lines and not Mehadrin. While this is not true, we are waiting for the committee’s report to see how to proceed. On June 1<sup>st</sup> of 2009, the court gave the state another three month postponement.

On August 30th, 2009, forty men and women from IRAC and other organizations joined together to ride the segregated buses in protest. None of the protestors sat next to ultra-Orthodox passengers or deliberately provoked them other than riding together in the front of the bus. In this case, there was no altercation. The driver chose not to interfere, which allowed us to stay up front. At the next stop, three Orthodox women sat next to us, since the back of the bus was now filled. We handed out leaflets to all of the women. The next day IRAC received phone calls from three ultra-Orthodox women thanking us for what we were doing and begging us to continue our struggle against state-sponsored segregated bus lines.

#### **Report on Gender Segregation in Public Spaces**

In 2008 IRAC conducted research throughout the greater Jerusalem area on all instances of gender segregation in public spaces and compiled all of this information in a report documenting segregation in stores, health clinics, and even public streets.

## **Rabbi Miri Gold – Recognition and State Funding for Reform Municipal Rabbis**

In June of 2009, IRAC had another hearing on the case of Rabbi Miri Gold. The High Court of Justice severely criticized the State, that after four years of the petition pending, the State still has not given an acceptable response. The proposal included in the Committee's report did not provide a solution to the problem, because it discussed the general topic of the rabbis in regional councils instead of giving a practical solution as the state was required to do.

The State's attorney stated that while the State is prepared to consider providing financial support to the Reform Movement, the State will not create a specific post for non-Orthodox rabbis in regional councils. The attorney claimed that it is too symbolic for the State to directly fund non-Orthodox rabbis, rather he raised the possibility of giving general funding to non-Orthodox communities to be distributed as the community sees fit.

We replied that we are not arguing about the symbols, but we insist on our right to receive support in our religious and rabbinical activities and we oppose to the suggestion that the State will give general financial support that can be changed or revoked at any time instead of allocating an official post.

At the end of the hearing, the court gave the State a period of 4 months, during which negotiations will take place between us and the State regarding the parameters according to which non-Orthodox services will be funded.

We will insist on intensive negotiations with the State, and if we do not reach an agreement, we will return to court

## **Discrimination against Women in Election Campaign**

IRAC won a case for two women candidates who were running for Jerusalem City Council and wanted to place campaign posters with their pictures on buses in Jerusalem – as all candidates do as a primary advertising strategy. To their bewilderment they were refused. Canaan, the bus ad agency explained that Egged, the Jerusalem bus company, prohibits ads with women's images. Egged denied the prohibition, though they still refused to place the ad. IRAC intervened and the day before the elections, IRAC presented before the Supreme Court. Due to the lack of time, the Supreme Court immediately concluded that Egged should place the ads. The ads were placed and paid for by Canaan .