

The organization that led to a revolution in the status of women

Since the second Zionist Congress in 1898, when Zionist women were allowed for the first time to vote, the founders of WIZO led the fight for the advancement of the status of women in Israeli society. Prof. Rivka Lazovsky, Chairperson of World WIZO, speaks on the organization's role in the establishment and the development of the State of Israel, in building the education and welfare systems and in the promotion of many laws that revolutionized the status of women

By Galit Shaphir

Facts and figures about WIZO: "It is an international Zionist organization of women, a leading service provider in the fields of education and welfare, which include: 180 Day Care Centers, a network of youth villages and vocational schools with more than 5,500 youngsters, thousands of legal aid bureaus, centers for girls at-risk, shelters for abused women, and centers for the prevention of domestic violence.

WIZO has more than 6,000 employees and over 30,000 volunteers in Israel and 200,000 volunteers in 50 countries."

Social accomplishments: "WIZO is a pioneer in the development of education and welfare services, which help closing social gaps, and an expert in the empowerment of vulnerable youth. Our activities include the establishment of youth villages for thousands of youngsters with no family support, child welfare centers, including Day Care Centers, unique and professional services to help victims of domestic violence and dozens of programs to support and empower women. All our services have been adopted by the State. WIZO is one of the first organizations that established a shelter for abused women in the 1980's, and we are the only organization that opened a special help-line for abusive men.

Outstanding achievement for women in 2017: "Michal Goldstein, graduate of WIZO's political leadership program, is the first woman to be elected as Deputy Director General of the Rabbinate Court Administration, following an intensive campaign led by WIZO and other women's organizations."

Plans for the future: "We will continue to promote a national program to stop violence against women, and we will continue to fight for a change in two main areas; extending the education frameworks for graduates until the age of 25 who have no family support; and we will continue to campaign to urge the Government to build more Day Care Centers. Today, around 370,000 children between the ages of 0-3 are left with no place in supervised Day Care Centers. Education at this age is elementary and must be made accessible to all for free."

Awards: "In 2008, WIZO won, jointly with Na'amat and Emunah, "Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement and Special contribution to Society and the State."

Leading campaigns against discrimination and violence against women

The status of women in the labor market: "Although many new laws have been passed in order to promote gender equality and protect women at their workplace, the current state of affairs is still far from perfect. We plan to continue our efforts in this field in various ways: by training and promoting women in the labor market and in empowering them to reach senior positions; working together with employers to create a better work atmosphere that allows women to achieve a healthy work-life balance; developing supportive systems for women (such as Day Care Centers, afternoon centers). In addition, we will continue to support and advance legislation that promote equality and for the prosecution of employers who discriminate against women."

#metoo campaign: "It is a very important campaign that encourages women to speak out about the sexual abuse and harassment they suffered, and promotes a change in the behavior of some men and in the acceptable and proper conduct in our communities and sectors. Recently, we have been witnessing a dangerous by-product of this campaign, which has led some men to avoid employing women because of fear of sexual harassment complaints. These by-products are troubling but an inseparable part of this process, which we need to be aware of and strive to prevent."

WIZO's contribution to the status of women in Israel: "WIZO has left its impact on the status of women since the birth of the State of Israel. In the early days of the State, it started the first vocational training courses for women and later it promoted women's role in the labor market. It continued to campaign for equal representation in the army and in other sectors, while leading national campaigns against discrimination and violence against women. Since the establishment of Israel, WIZO initiated and took part in the drafting of dozens of social laws. These laws include: Women's Equal Rights Law; labor laws for women (maternity leave and other leave days relating to pregnancy and motherhood); equal opportunities at the workplace; equal pay law for women employees; retirement law (which allows women to retire between the ages of 62-67), and many more."

The contribution of the Jewish people to the status of women around the world: "The second Jewish Congress in 1898 allowed Zionist women to vote for the first time. Few people know that some of the people behind this historic move that paved the way for a change in the status of women in the Yeshuv and later in Israel are WIZO's founding mothers – Rebecca Sieff and Dr. Vera Weizmann."

Less familiar historic fact: "Only two women signed Israel's Declaration of Independence – Golda Meir and Rachel Cohen-Kagan, Chairperson of WIZO and the woman who established the WIZO political party. She was the Member of Knesset who drafted the first law that secure equal rights for women."

Third generation in WIZO

Your personal link to WIZO: "I am a third generation of WIZO volunteers. My grandmother was an active member of WIZO Vienna, the capital of Austria, in the pre-Second World War period. My mother was President of WIZO Uruguay, and later was a member of the World WIZO Executive. I was born into the WIZO family and I have been active ever since. I also established a group of young WIZO leaders. Since 2012, I have been serving as the Chairperson of World WIZO."

Your advice for women: "Dream and make your dreams come true, without fear, because you can truly make them happen! I also think it is important that we women support each other."

Name and family name: Prof. Rivka Lazovsky

Marital status: Married, two children, and four grandchildren.

Education: B. A. degree in Bible Studies, Hebrew Language and Literature from University of Haifa. M.A. and PhD in educational counselling. Holds the degree of Professor in educational counselling.

Role: Chairperson of World WIZO

Establishment: 1920

Previous roles: One of the founders of educational counselling in Israel and the founder of the of educational counsellors' association.

Head of the faculty of educational counselling at Beit Berl College, head of Organization, Education and Aviv Department at World WIZO (on a volunteering basis) and more.

International activity: Advising several United Nation institutions including UNICEF and Ecosoc.