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400 world rabbis ask police to protect Women of the Wall

By MELANIE LIDMAN
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Kotel's rabbi: I call on them to behave according to the customs of the area and not to insult the sensitivities of the other people praying.

More than 400 rabbis from around the world have signed a letter asking Jerusalem police to protect women at the Western Wall who want to pray and read the Torah together, one year after nursing student Nofrat Frenkel was arrested for taking out a Torah in the women's section of the Western Wall Plaza.

Frenkel is a member of the Women of the Wall organization, which advocates for women's rights to perform religious actions, such as wearing prayer shawls and reading from the Torah, at the Western Wall.

The letter, organized by Los Angeles Rabbi Pamela Frydman, asked the mayor and police chief of Jerusalem to "immediately institute and enforce a zero-tolerance policy against attacking women in any way whatsoever, including throwing chairs and feces-filled diapers and other objects at women who pray together."

The letter, co-authored by 28 rabbis, has also been signed by close to 500 other individuals and organizations from various Jewish denominations across the world, bringing the total to over 900 signatories. It was also sent to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Jewish Agency chairman Natan Sharansky, along with other prominent politicians.

"It is extremely important to us that there always be a place for haredi men and women in a way that is comfortable for them and in accordance with their understanding of Halacha," said Frydman, who is the director of the Holocaust Education Project at the Academy for Jewish Religion in Los Angeles, and was ordained through the Jewish Renewal movement.

"But it is equally important for us that those of us who are Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and Renewal that we have a place where we can pray in accordance with our understanding."

Jerusalem Police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said that the police would respond directly to the authors of the letter.

"The Women of the Wall are welcome, like every Jewish woman, to come to the Western Wall," Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovich, chief rabbi of the Western Wall, told *The Jerusalem Post*. "It is forbidden for anyone to harm them, as violence is totally forbidden at the Western Wall. Together with this... I call on them to behave according to the customs of the area and not to insult the sensitivities of the other people praying."

Another police source pointed out that the women were arrested after engaging in activities that were

forbidden by Supreme Court decisions.

“On the one hand, they’re breaking the law, and on the other hand, they’re asking for expanded protection in order to break the law,” said the police source.

On Monday, when the women mark the new Hebrew month of Kislev, Nofrat Frenkel will lead services to mark the one-year anniversary of her arrest. She was arrested after attempting to bring out the Torah in the main women’s section, which is against the law.

“It was the global support we received that put the wind in our sails,” said Frenkel in a statement. “After my arrest, Jews in both Israel and the Diaspora understood that we have to win this battle by foot.

Men and women, from all sects of Judaism, have arrived monthly to pray with WOW at the Kotel and insist on their right for freedom of worship.”

The Women of the Wall has also started a campaign asking women around the world to send photos of them reading and holding Torahs, in order to illustrate that this is a worldwide movement. They have collected more than 4,000 photos.

“Israelis have given up on the Wall,” said Anat Hoffman, chairwoman of Women of the Wall and the executive director of the Israel Religious Action Center, who was also arrested at a Women of the Wall event six months ago. “They feel uncomfortable there... People have made them feel as if they’re not coming home, but trampling on someone else’s place. There are territorial behaviors, saying, ‘Wear something different,’ ‘Move from here,’ ‘Move from there.’” Frydman is currently leading a delegation to Israel of around 20 people, both men and women, to support Women of the Wall and attend Monday’s Rosh Hodesh service.

“There’s a saying, ‘Respect comes even before Torah,’” Frydman said. “We believe it’s important to respect the haredi way of worship, and our way of worship as well.”



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