

Israeli Women Serving Prison Time for Refusal to Join IDF

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"Many were incarcerated again and again as they refused to enlist after their release from prison" - Israeli Peace Activist Gila Svirsky Omer Goldman refused to participate in illegal aggression against Palestinian people and was sent to prison. Photo courtesy: gilasvirsky.com

(SALEM, Ore.) - Americans are raised to believe that Israel is an ally of the United States, and for most of us growing up here, there was no question about it. In many ways it is true that Israel is a U.S. ally, and in many ways it is not. Women of Israel are expected to serve in the military service

The U.S. is a country with both freedom of religion, and a declared separation of church and state. There has been plenty of religious persecution here over the years, but by and large and for the most part, especially today, Americans are able to worship how and where they please.

One of the biggest conflicts for some, is the fact that Israel is a religious state. There is no separation of church and state in the Jewish State, so if you don't belong to the right culture and religion, you're more or less out of luck.

Your neighbor could be a Palestinian and a lifelong friend, but you as an Israeli can not sell your house to him, even if you want to, because he is Palestinian. Israel's government and military are utterly and completely prejudiced. 1

We are just getting started.

The list of injustices against the Palestinians is so long and bad that it is little wonder people just ignore it. In Gaza in particular, people are treated like caged animals.

Crossing points are blocked off, 2 food shipments for Gazans are turned away more often than not, and the Israeli's were recently blocking the arrival of building materials, though Israel itself destroyed all of the buildings that needed to be rebuilt.

Palestinians are trapped on the Gaza Strip with Israeli soldiers in towers with rifles everywhere they go. Sometimes the soldiers take pot shots at people, occasionally killing pedestrians, including old people and small children. It isn't just Gaza. This is not a policy of the IDF, it couldn't be, but the reports from Gaza are horrifying. 3

The Holy Land of Three Religions

In 1947 and 1948, the new citizens of Israel, including many survivors of the horrors of Nazi Germany, moved to Palestine. It didn't go well and it never stopped going badly.

There are and were good people on all sides, but the tragic plight of the Jew was not the fault of the Palestinian people. Because they are Muslim, they are dismissed in terms of importance. This is not acceptable, and it rings of Apartheid in South Africa and that didn't last. This young woman from Gaza killed in January by the Israeli military is about the same age as the girls from Israeli refusing the military. Al Jazeera photo

Over the years, Israel has been heavily funded by U.S. taxpayer revenue, 4 to the tune of many billions, some say trillions, and it has used that money gained from American labor, to stockpile an array of military equipment, almost all U.S., that it uses today to pound its neighbors to death.

I have always wanted to know more about the people in Israel who speak out against the mindless military violence.

I have many contacts who work with me on the Palestinian side of the cause, but not enough Israelis. Finally I am getting dialed in with some of the information I have been looking for.

The women listed below were sent to prison; "Many were incarcerated again and again as they refused to enlist after their release from prison. Some are part of the movement called 'Shministim' - meaning 'high school seniors' - a movement of young men and women who refuse to enlist. Others came to this hard decision on their own. All are

heroes," Israeli Peace Activist Gila Svirsky, said.

Svirsky, who will be in Portland, Oregon and also Corvallis on September 29th, says "It is time for these settlements to stop". She does not believe that Settlements are compatible with a two-state solution.

She describes herself as a writer and an Israeli Jew deeply involved in peace and human rights activism.

The information below comes from her Website, gilasvirsky.com, and also from The Movement for the Civilization of Israeli Society.

Israeli Women Who Refuse

Gila Svirsky says the young women were all were 18 when they made the hard choice: Say no to war and occupation, or say yes to prison. Some of the girls were granted permission from the Israeli authorities to do alternative service; but others were just locked up in prison.

Below are brief statements from some of the brave young women who refuse to serve. Gila Svirsky compiled the data from the website of New Profile: The Movement for the Civilization of Israeli Society, an Israeli feminist peace organization which gives them much-needed support.

Omer Goldman:

"My father was deputy head of the Mossad, but I refuse to enlist in the Israeli military. I shall not be part of an army that needlessly implements a violent policy and violates the most basic human rights on a daily basis."

"Like most of my peers, I too dared not question the ethics of the Israeli military. But when I visited the Occupied Territories, I realized there was a completely different reality, a violent, oppressive, extreme reality that must be ended."

"I believe in service to the society I am part of, and that is precisely why I refuse to take part in the war crimes committed by my country. Violence will not bring any kind of solution, and I shall not commit violence, come what may".

Mia Tamarin:

"I have no doubt that I should be serving my country, I have been doing so in many ways from a very young age, and intend of course to continue doing so, not out of compulsion, but fully and truly of my own will. I cannot become part of an organization whose purpose is to fend off violence by violence, because this unequivocally opposes everything I believe in and my whole life. There is always another, non-violent option, and this is the option I choose."

Tamar Katz:

"I refuse to enlist in the Israeli military on grounds of conscience. I am not willing to become part of an occupying army, which has been an invader of foreign lands for decades, which perpetuates a racist regime of robbery in these lands, tyrannizes civilians, and makes life harsh for millions under a false pretext of security."

"I oppose the anti-Palestinian policy of attrition and oppression, not because I prefer Palestinian to Israeli society, but from the understanding that this policy has led us to a dead-end politically and morally, forced particularly on soldiers stationed in the Occupied Territories. I am not willing to become one of those who points a gun indiscriminately at Palestinian civilians, and I do not believe that such actions could bring change except even more antagonism and violence in our region."

Sahar Vardi:

"I have been to the occupied Palestinian territory many times, and even though I realize that the soldier at the checkpoint is not responsible for the wretched policy of the oppressor toward civilians, I am unable to exempt that soldier of responsibility for his conduct ... I mean the human responsibility of not causing suffering to another human being."

"The bloody times in which I live (assassinations, aggression, bombings, shootings) result in increasing numbers of victims on both sides. It is a vicious circle that emanates from the fact that both sides elect to engage in violence. This choice I refuse to take part in."

Hadas Amit:

"If I were to be recruited into the army, this would absolutely and in all respects contradict my convictions and way in life, since violence, killing, nationalism, and vandalism are not part of them. I am not willing to wear the uniform of an organization responsible for killing and destruction, and acting in a way detrimental to the environment. Every country,

Israel included, should act by peaceful means alone, and even if attacked, not respond with fire. In any situation, Israel included, it is wrong to maintain a military force trained for war and killing – this is altogether contrary to the pursuit of peace and coexistence with our neighbors in the Middle East."

Idan Halili:

"A strongly patriarchal institution, like the army, underscores female marginality … and the superiority of male-identified values. … It might be said that a mood of sexual harassment is endemic to … the army. And so the demand that a woman enlist is tantamount to demanding that she cope with sexual harassment … Since the army is such a central institution in society, a culture of sexual harassment also is exported to … civic society. … As a feminist, I feel I must avoid military service and act to limit and reduce the influence of the army on civic society. … When men spend a formative period of their lives in the military they are likely to receive positive reinforcements for the use of brute power and violence … in an organization whose main values include superiority and control. … I cannot join an organization which, either directly or indirectly, encourages violence – of any form and kind – against women. … I cannot live in such flagrant denial of my conscience."

Laura Milo:

"I cannot take part in the injustices that our country carries out through the IDF. I am not a pacifist; my objection is to the occupation. I went to Yeruham [national service] with a sense of pioneering, forming a new model of community work. Through the young people I worked with and my personal experience, I encountered the ugliness of our society, the injustice guiding the policies of our government. This work reinforced my sense of duty to create something different. It is the duty of my conscience to tell my truth fully. I will refuse to serve out of a deeply personal motive: so I can go on living in this country at peace with what my conscience tells me."

Danya Vaknin:

"At times it seems like it would have been easier to enlist. The price of resistance is high. I've lost most of my friends. My friends are in the army now. They can't talk to me without getting angry or without dealing with a lot of emotions. I know I won't stand for it, that I won't accept the “no choice” outlook, that I can't be part of the army, that I can't occupy, that I can't oppress. After all, the value system I've constructed clashes so clearly with serving in the IDF. Today more than ever, I have no problem saying that and really meaning it."

Tal Matalon:

"And then Efrat calls. "Remember Adi? Who was in our class till the middle of 11th grade? She was killed in the suicide attack." Adi!? What!? What is she talking about?? I didn't even say anything, just hung up and started crying. I called Netta and told her. She came over to my place and we sat down and tried to think what we're supposed to do now. Then Barel called. I was just trying to phone someone else. Netta answered the phone and suddenly she's sitting on the floor in my living room, screaming. Ofer was killed too. Ofer. He studied architecture. I can't remember one person who didn't like him. We went to his best friend's house. His whole class was there, and most people from our year, too. I sat with some of them in the kitchen. Everything was full of cigarette smoke and photo albums from school trips. And then one of them said that all Arabs should be killed. And when everyone agreed, he went on and said that after we finish the Arabs off, we should kill all lefties too. Maybe even before, so that they don't interfere. Only one of them noticed me sitting there and told him to shut up."

Shani Werner:

"After the second open letter from high school seniors [resisters] was published, Haggai gave an interview on TV. I was watching it as my father walked in. When Haggai was done, my father said, “Traitors, that's a disgrace. They should be executed.” I reminded him that I was a draft resister, that I was doing just the same thing..."

"People my age are preoccupied with the army now. They're doing fitness training before they enlist, going to aptitude tests, medical examinations, screenings for special units. Naturally, they talk about it all the time. They try to explain it to me, I try to take an interest. But it feels funny all around. I was always different. Now I'm an outsider…"

Sources:

1. Window Into Palestine: Millions of Palestinian refugees who are denied any passports while they live under Israeli curfews and martial law
2. The BBC: Timeline: Gaza blockade crisis

3. uknet.info: Palestinian Children Murdered by IDF Snipers

4. Washington Post: A Tax Break Fuels Middle East Friction

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