

JOURNEYING TOWARDS JUSTICE

IRAC'S TRAVEL GUIDE TO ISRAEL





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WELCOME TO THE TRAVEL GUIDE

The modern State of Israel, founded in 1948, is truly a land overflowing—a land overflowing with history, natural beauty, a diversity of peoples, and complexity. The nation is also a **study in contrasts**, where the modern coexists with the ancient, the religious with the secular, and tradition with innovation.

Israel's Declaration of Independence includes a strong commitment to pluralism, stating that "it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on **freedom, justice and peace** as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete **equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex**; it will guarantee **freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture.**"

The Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) is committed to embracing Israel's diversity and pluralism and strengthening its democracy. **IRAC is our collective Jewish identity in action in Israel.** We created this guide to introduce you to the history, beauty, and complexity of Israel and the work that IRAC is doing in the **ongoing pursuit of a just Israeli society.**



Since IRAC's founding in 1987, we've worked in the following areas to **secure civil rights for a just and egalitarian Israel**:



Advancing freedom of
and from religion



Ensuring state recognition and
equal status for Reform and
Conservative rabbis, synagogues,
and institutions



Advancing gender and
LGBTQ equality in the public
domain



Advancing racial equality
and combatting hate



Strengthening
Israel's democracy



Protecting the rights of converts
and immigrants to become Israeli
citizens and enjoy equal rights

In *Journeying Towards Justice: IRAC's Travel Guide to Israel*, we take you on a tour of Israel's rich history and beauty through the perspectives of the many voices present in Israeli society. We highlight Israel's abundance as well as its challenges and illustrate how IRAC works to **support Israel's pluralism and strengthen its democracy**.

This guide was created to be both fun and inspiring. While we're proud of IRAC's many accomplishments—several of which are highlighted throughout the guide—**there is still much to do to create a more just, pluralistic Israel**. As we travel through Israel together, we hope you'll learn more about this beautiful country and **how you can help** to create a more just, equal, and democratic Israel!

So get ready... and let's begin by deciding "What to Pack"!

WHAT TO PACK

Be sure to bring...



Your moral compass



An open heart to understand
the diverse people you'll meet



The ability to listen to and learn
about the many different
religions and cultures in Israel



An open mind to absorb
your experiences , and
the ability to change
your mind from your
preconceptions

These things will allow you to truly experience and process your journey, the places you go, the things you see, the people you meet, and the ideas you learn.

It's very easy to get bogged down in the preconceptions presented to us by the media—**but Israel is not a monolith, nor are Israelis.** There are many different types of people in Israel, with various religions, cultures, and ideas.

The best thing you can do is to be ready and open to listening to and experiencing Israel's many faces. After all, **an educated tourist is IRAC's best partner!**

FLYING TO ISRAEL

When flying to Israel, remember you have the right to sit in the seat you purchased on your flight. **It is illegal for flight attendants to pressure you to change seats, based on your gender.** Make sure to ask a flight attendant for help if you ever feel pressured to move (or if you witness someone else being pressured to move!) on the basis of gender. ALL airlines flying into Israel are required to honor your seating assignment.



Renee Rabinowitz, z"l, greeting Riki Shapira Rosenberg, the IRAC lawyer who represented her in court.



IRAC Case: Renee Rabinowitz

It was December of 2015. **Renee Rabinowitz, z"l**, an 81-year-old Holocaust survivor, had boarded her El Al flight and was ready to fly to Tel Aviv. But shortly after Rabinowitz had settled into her seat, a flight attendant approached her and **asked her to change seats to accommodate the man who was supposed to sit next to her.**

The man, who was ultra-Orthodox, had raised a complaint with the flight attendant about sitting next to a woman. Reluctantly, Rabinowitz agreed to switch seats.

"I felt minimized," said Rabinowitz in a New York Times interview. **"For me this is not personal. It is intellectual, ideological and legal. I think to myself, here I am, an older woman, educated, I've been around the world, and some guy can decide that I shouldn't sit next to him. Why?"**

A few weeks later, Rabinowitz attended a talk by IRAC's Anat Hoffman and **was inspired to file a lawsuit against El Al through IRAC for gender-based discrimination.**

Ultimately, the court determined that **it's a violation of Israel's anti-discrimination law to ask passengers to switch seats because of their genders, ordered El Al to stop such discrimination, and compensate Rabinowitz for damages.**

Rabinowitz said, "I'm thrilled because the judge understood the issue. She realized it is not a question of money... it's a matter of El Al changing its policy, which they have been ordered to do."

This policy change applies to not only El Al, but all other airlines as well, marking an immensely important victory for gender equality in Israel.

TAKE ACTION

Keep a virtual or printed copy of our **Rights on Flights guide** on-hand, and ask a flight attendant for support if someone is being pressured to move seats because of their gender. **Flight attendants on ALL airlines are required to help!** If they don't provide adequate assistance, record your conversation and email us the details at pluralist@irac.org.



Scan this QR code for our Rights on Flights guide!

TRANSPORTATION IN ISRAEL

There are many ways to get around in Israel. Many private tours charter their own bus, but for the independent tourist, **the best ways to get about are car rentals, buses, trains, and taxis.**

TAKING THE BUS

You have the right to board and sit where you choose on the bus, a right that IRAC defended.



IRAC Case: Gender Segregation on Buses

Starting in 1997, public transportation companies began operating special bus lines for the ultra-Orthodox. **Seating was segregated by gender, and women had to board through the rear door and sit at the back of the bus.** Women who objected to the rules were subjected to harassment and intimidation—and in some cases, physical violence. **After IRAC filed a petition, the Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that gender segregation on buses violates the dignity and equality of women and is therefore illegal.**

While the situation improved, **these incidents still happen occasionally.** In 2019, **Nur Bar-On** was barred by the bus driver from entering the bus when the driver announced there was only room for men. The case that was resolved in 2022 with the bus company paying a fine and paying her damages. The driver also had to pay her damages, and sign that he will not commit such discrimination for three years or have his license suspended for three months.

There continue to be attempts to force gender segregation on public buses in ultra-Orthodox areas. These take the form of signs and ads. IRAC monitors such attempts and takes legal action against them.



Rabbi Noa Sattath and a group of Freedom Riders who rode the buses to protest gender segregation.

YOUR TURN

If someone on the bus tries to dictate where you sit or how you should dress, or if you witness such an incident, please **contact the driver for help; they are required to help you.** If that does not work, then record the incident and report it to IRAC with the when, where, and what, as well as if there were witnesses or a film taken of it and your contact information.



Scan this QR code to report an incident

Want to be a freedom rider? Contact IRAC at pluralist@irac.org to schedule a freedom ride for your visiting group to see and protest gender segregation on public buses.

TAKING THE TRAIN



IRAC Case: Gender Segregation on Israel Railways

In 2018 **Maya Melitz** was asked by an Israel Railways attendant to move to a different car in the train because 15 minutes earlier a group of men had begun to pray in that car. **She was only reading her book, but apparently her presence as a woman was disruptive to their prayer.** She refused to move, reminding the attendant that this was a public space, not an Orthodox Synagogue.

She felt humiliated, so she reached out to IRAC who contacted Israel Railways on her behalf, eventually receiving from them a denial of the incident. In 2020 IRAC and the Israel Women's Network sued Israel Railways, and in 2022 they agreed to compensate Maya for damages and to change their policies to ensure that such discrimination will not happen again.



IRAC Case: Racial Profiling on Israel Railways

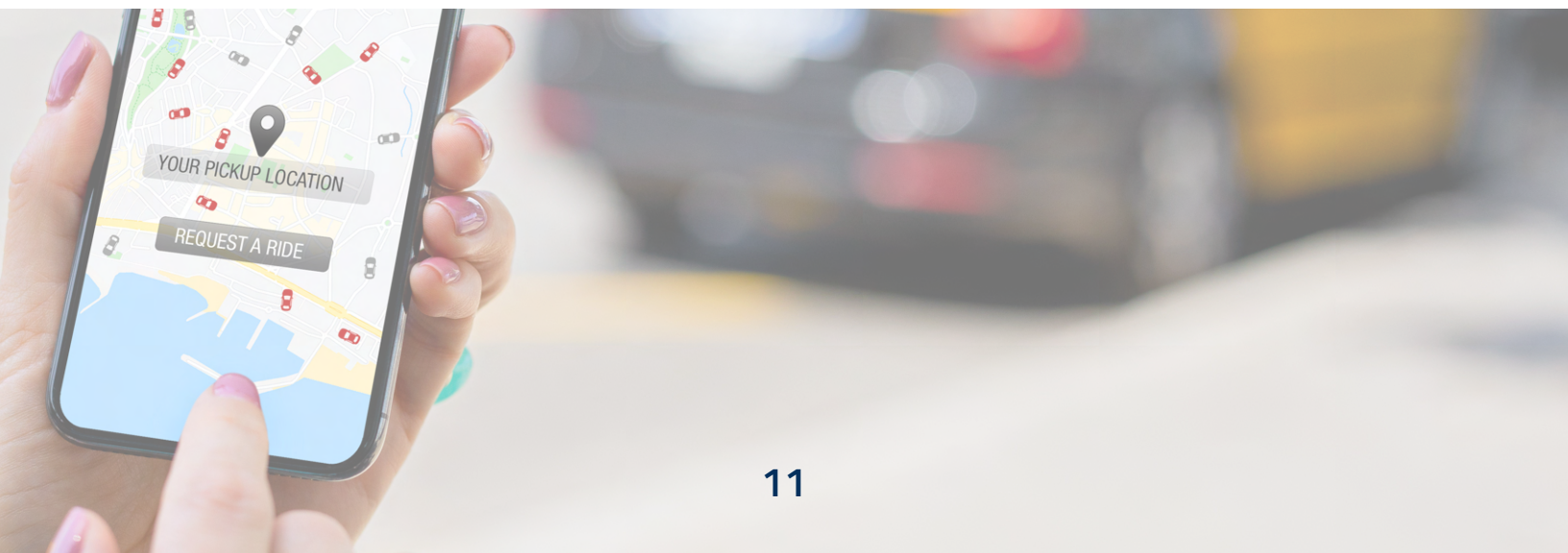
In 2018 **Hiyam Ezbaga, who was wearing a hijab, attempted to travel by train home from school.** However, she had forgotten her ID card, which was routinely checked by security. The security guards called the police and performed a complete security check on her. **They found no threat on her but made her wait outside for the police nonetheless.** While she waited, she found her passport, an acceptable alternate form of ID, in her bag and showed it to security. They should have let her through then, but they still made her wait for the police. When the police finally arrived they performed a security check and found no threat, but failed to tell train security, forcing a humiliated Hiyam to take a long bus ride home.

Afterwards, she reported the blatant and humiliating incident of racial profiling to IRAC's Racism Crisis Center. IRAC complained to Israel Railways on her behalf, and then eventually filed a suit against Israel Railways and the police. However, despite the evidence in her favor, the case was rejected in 2019. **IRAC will continue to work to promote racial equality and combat racial profiling in Israel.**

TAKING A TAXI

You may be familiar with Uber and Lyft as relatively inexpensive ways to take a taxi or ride-share. In Israel neither of those exists, **the closest option is Gett Taxi**. Gett has an app you can download, and your taxi will usually show up within minutes of ordering it.

However, **Gett is not free from attempts at discrimination**. In 2015, Gett Taxi company launched "Gett Mehadrin", a service that declares its purpose as providing drivers who do not travel on Shabbat, but in practice excludes Arab drivers, thus **discriminating against Arab taxi drivers**. Often Gett users will be assigned Gett Mehadrin driver even if it was not requested, making them partisan in the discrimination.



Gett Mehadrin operates only in Jerusalem, which has the largest number of Arab taxi drivers, and its creation was prompted by requests from the ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem. IRAC refuses to put up with such blatant racism, and thus filed a class action lawsuit against Gett on behalf of the Arab drivers, and riders who were inadvertently forced to take part in the discrimination. The lawsuit is still pending.



TAKE ACTION

If you choose to travel around Israel via taxi, you may opt to download Gett and easily order and pay for a taxi through the app. **Just make sure that you don't choose the Gett Mehadrin service while you're in Jerusalem.** While on your ride, feel free to talk to your taxi driver and ask them about their experiences.



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ON SHABBAT



While planning for Shabbat and holidays, it is essential to note that **public transportation is not available from an hour before Shabbat starts on Friday until an hour after Shabbat ends on Saturday** in most cities. Depending on where you are, most restaurants will close early on Friday for Shabbat, and most stores will be closed on Saturday. **You must plan and make sure that you are prepared** for the change in atmosphere around Shabbat and holidays.

Public transportation in most of Israel does not run from Friday afternoon through Saturday night. This is a political decision resulting from the strong religious opposition to running public transportation on Shabbat. This is harmful and limiting to many people who do not have private vehicles or cannot drive, causing them to either be stuck or be required to take costly taxis to travel on their one day off. This is especially harmful to people with disabilities, poorer families, students, other young people, etc. who cannot afford private vehicles or taxis.

In recent years, a number of towns and regions in central Israel have decided to run free public transportation in a limited framework on Shabbat. This is far from a comprehensive solution, as these services only run in richer cities. IRAC continues to advocate for the expansion and implementation of public transportation on Shabbat to address the needs of all Israelis.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Although Israel is a small country (8,630 sq. miles—about the size of the state of New Jersey), it abounds with a beautiful, diverse geography that includes ocean, mountain, and desert regions. What’s more, Israel’s diverse topography is matched by its diverse population and rich history. **Accommodations can be found in all of its regions: by the sea, in the mountains, in the desert, or in one of Israel's bustling metropolitan areas.** You can choose from a rich array of possibilities including luxury 5-star accommodations, desert camping grounds, seaside lodging, and youth hostels.

As you travel, keep in mind:



A hotel or lodging establishment **cannot deny you entrance or access because of their own (or other guests') personal modesty codes.** This is illegal.



You have the right to pray as you choose including using music (at appropriate sound levels in hotel conference rooms, with the doors closed).

Religious Restrictions in Lodging Establishments

Although in the majority of interactions, lodging establishments and venues will respect guests' rights and not impose religious restrictions such as modesty codes, such incidents, alas, do occur. **Here are two such examples:**

1) A small group of women arrived early for their reservation at a youth hostel. They were prevented by management from entering the hostel because ultra-Orthodox guests were on the premises. **The women were wrongly restricted to a small room for a few hours** until the Haredi guests departed.

2) Visiting Reform groups were not allowed to conduct Shabbat services with musical instruments in a hotel and were fallaciously told that the hotel would lose its kashrut certificate if they did. This is a result of illegal threats made by the Chief Rabbinate to remove kashrut certification of hotels that allow such prayer.

TAKE ACTION

Map out your itinerary. **Where do you want to go while you're in Israel, and where will you stay?** Would you like to experience and stay in several areas throughout the country (e.g. city, desert, seaside) or would you prefer to stay in one central location and travel to other locations from there? **What's your budget?**

Were you prevented from carrying out activities or prayer services in your hotel *illegally*? Document the incident and turn to us at pluralist@irac.org.

PLACES TO VISIT

SAFED

Located in Israel's north, the city of **Safed** abounds with rich history and natural beauty. Situated in the dense pine forests of the Upper Galilee at an elevation of 900 meters, Safed is the highest city in Israel. **It is also considered to be one of the holiest cities as well as the most mystical city in Israel.** Why, the most mystical? After Spain's expulsion of the Jews in 1492, many now **famous Kabbalists** such as Rabbi Isaac Luria (the ARI) and Rabbi Moshe Kordovero found their way to Safed and established great centers of learning there.

With its over 2,000-year history, great natural beauty, and vibrant culture, there are many wonderful places to visit and events to attend in Safed. **Highlights include:** the Artists' Quarter, the Safed Annual Klezmer Festival, and the Ari Sephardi synagogue.

THE CHIEF RABBI OF SAFED

IRAC Case: Racist and Discriminatory Speech

Many cities in Israel have a Chief Rabbi, a public position that comes with a very high salary from the state. The Chief Rabbi serves as a Jewish leader and public servant for all Jewish city residents, and, as a public official, is prohibited from making racist, demeaning, and political comments.

"Jews don't need to run from Arabs, they need to chase them away"

"Arab culture is a criminal culture"

"Their main problem is that they are liars, they have a culture of lies"

-Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu against Arabs

For many years, however, the **Chief Rabbi of Safed, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu**, has abused his authority to engage in **racist and discriminatory speech** against much of the public including the LGBTQ community, women in the army, and Arab residents. He also illegally uses his authority to encourage the public to vote for a specific political party.

In 2016, IRAC filed a petition with the Supreme Court of Israel demanding that the Minister of Justice take disciplinary action against Rabbi Eliyahu for his ongoing inappropriate racist and political remarks. In 2020, **the Supreme Court ruled against Rabbi Eliyahu** and demanded that the Minister of Justice take disciplinary action against him.

The State continues to drag their feet rather than act against Rabbi Eliyahu, who **continues to make harmful and illegal statements.**

"We must not let this country become LGBTQistan. There is LGBTQ terror on the system, which forces itself against healthy thinking...they are a sick society, should we give legitimacy to illness? They are deviants."

-Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu against the LGBTQ community

Make sure to visit Israel's scenic southern Negev region characterized by gorgeous desert scenery. Highlights include David Ben Gurion's home in S'de Boker, the Ramon Crater, and of course Bedouin hospitality.

IRAC Case: Advancing Voting Rights in Unrecognized Bedouin Villages in the Negev

The **right to vote** is one of the **fundamental rights of a democracy**, and is even written into Israel's constitution-level Basic Laws. Nonetheless, **tens of thousands of Israel's Bedouin citizens** who live in the unrecognized villages in Israel's Negev region **do not have access to this fundamental right**.

There are **35 unrecognized Bedouin villages** in the Negev. Some have existed since before the foundation of the State of Israel, while others have been in existence for several decades, since the 1980s, when the State began to push Bedouins to live in more organized towns and villages.

According to current voting policies, polling places for Bedouins are determined by their tribe rather than their address. This means that the members of three different tribes who live in one village will be assigned to three different polling places based on tribal affiliation and not geography. This has created a situation where **many must travel hours to reach their assigned polling place**, which could be anywhere between **5 and 65 kilometers** from their homes. Add to this the lack of public transportation, private cars, and poor or undeveloped roads in and around

these villages, and most residents of these unrecognized villages are essentially disenfranchised because they do not have access to their polling places. As a result, they have one of the lowest voter turnout rates in all of Israel: **30-40% voter turnout**



A visit to the unrecognized villages in the Negev

among Bedouins in comparison to 65-70% among the general public.

IRAC is working together with the Abraham Initiatives and the Council of Unrecognized Villages in the Negev towards more accessible polling places for Bedouins living in unrecognized towns and villages in the Negev. We are working to advance legislation that will allow all voters to choose their voting place so that residents of unrecognized villages will be able to choose a polling place close to their homes. However, because of political instability, this has been put on hold. We are working to ensure that residents of these villages will have better access to their assigned polling places in the upcoming elections so they can realize their right to vote.



BET SHEMESH

Bet Shemesh is a city about 30 kilometers outside of Jerusalem. It's a small, suburban area with a mixed ultra-Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, and secular Jewish population. Bet Shemesh is a very old city, featured in the Bible. Unfortunately, due to the large Haredi population, the city has faced issues around gender equality.



IRAC Case: Modesty Signs in Bet Shemesh

In 2011, a group of Orthodox Jewish women, Nili Philipp, Eve Finkelstein, Miriam Friedman Zussman, and Rachely Yair Schloss, from Bet Shemesh reached out to IRAC to express some of the deep humiliation they felt as women in Bet Shemesh as a result of modesty signs which aim to limit women's freedom of movement and dress.



Hebrew and English modesty signs

In Bet Shemesh, there were signs throughout the city demanding proper dress. **These signs only target women.** One sign outside of a public shopping mall, populated by religious and secular people, read, "Kiryat Mishkanot Yaakov, Bet

Shemesh Welcome to the Haredi Shopping Center Customers are required to respect the feelings of the residents that are faithful to God and his Torah. **And to wear modest dress.** This includes: Closed blouses with long sleeves, long skirts, no pants, no tight or revealing dress." Additionally, not all signs are only about dress requirements; one sign outside of a synagogue read, "**Women are requested not to loiter** in front of the synagogue."

IRAC decided to assist the women of Bet Shemesh and address the issues of the modesty signs. Nili had been a target of violence from Orthodox men who deemed her not modest enough, and after her first meeting with IRAC, she shares:

I walked into the building and met IRAC attorney Orly Erez-Likhovski. Immediately I felt safe, embraced and supported. I didn't have to justify my feelings or the trauma that I suffered in Bet Shemesh. People in my community asked questions like: "Why can't you just ignore the signs?" Or "Why does it bother you to have to cross the street?" When I first heard these questions, my jaw dropped. But everyone at IRAC understood me right away.

At the time, **city officials refused to intervene and remove the signs,** therefore acting in complicity with this gender discrimination. IRAC sued the city to remove these offensive signs and compensate each woman named in the case for the emotional distress. In 2015, **IRAC won the lawsuit against the city of Bet Shemesh,** and the Bet Shemesh Magistrate's Court ordered the municipality to pay the women a total of \$18,000—**but the city did not remove the signs.**

IRAC continued with the case, and in June 2016, the Jerusalem District Court gave the city three weeks to remove the signs. **The signs were still not removed.**

In 2017, the Jerusalem District Court demanded that Bet Shemesh pay a fine every day until the city removed the signs. The municipality appealed this ruling, and they were ordered to remove all modesty signs and install security cameras in known problem



Our clients erasing Bet Shemesh graffiti demanding "modest dress" on the street.

areas. In addition, the Supreme Court ordered increased police presence to defer the signs from being replaced.

After the ruling current IRAC director, Orly Erez-Likhovski, who was working on the case as director of the IRAC legal department shared:

This decision will be precedent-setting. It sends a clear message to the radicals that things are going to change, that women's rights to walk freely in the public sphere will be protected and that the rule of law applies in Bet Shemesh as anywhere else.

Over the last 10 years, **IRAC has fought at every level of court for the women of Bet Shemesh.** The fight is not over. Many of the signs and graffiti which had been removed have since been replaced and repainted. At this point, **it is no longer just a city issue but a systemic issue.** The Attorney General and the Ministries of the Interior and Homeland Security need to come together to help address this issue on a systematic level.

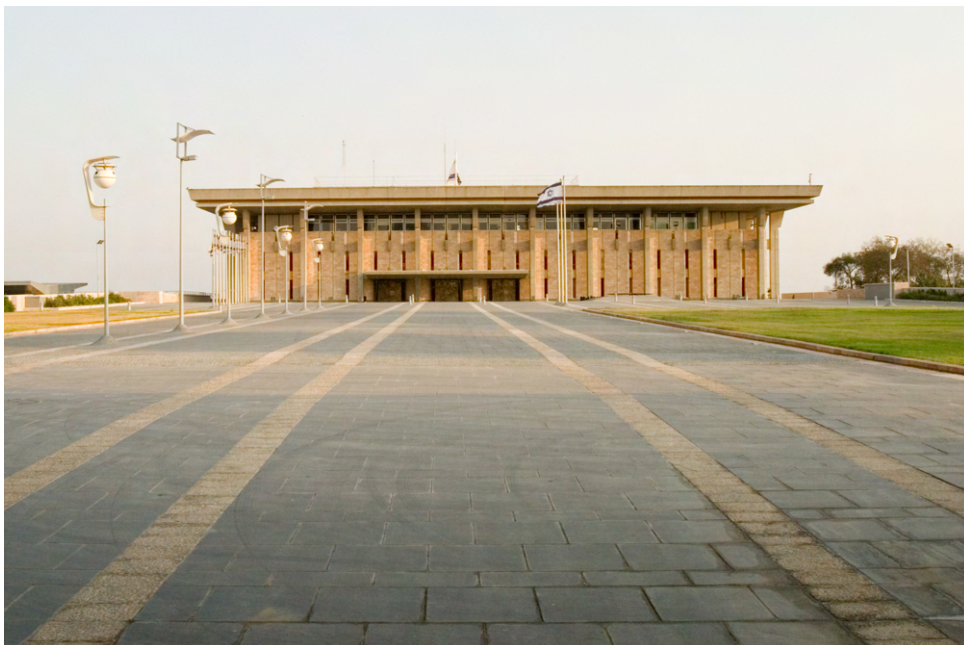
Modesty signs are not isolated to Bet Shemesh. IRAC uses this legal precedent to demand their removal from other cities and towns throughout Israel.

JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is Israel's capital and one of the oldest cities in the world. A holy place for Jews, Muslims, and Christians, the Old City of Jerusalem contains **some of the most significant religious sites** for visitors from all over the world. Jerusalem is also **where the Knesset (Israel's parliament) sits** and where the Prime Minister's official house, the Supreme Court, and many government offices are located.

THE KNESSET

The Knesset is the Israeli Parliament and legislative branch of the Israeli government. There are 120 Members of Knesset (MKs) who vote on all laws, elect the President and Prime Minister, compose the cabinet, and supervise the work of the Israeli government. **IRAC works to ensure that the Knesset and government uphold civil rights and the value of justice for all.**



The Knesset - Israel's parliament



Knesset elections occur once every four years. **Elections can be held sooner** if the often fragile coalition disintegrates. In recent years, there has been greater political instability which has led to a continuous loop of elections that have not resulted in a stable government.

While you're in Jerusalem, take a **free tour of the Knesset**. The Knesset Visitor Center offers a variety of tour themes, including law, environment, art, and more!

SUPREME COURT OF ISRAEL

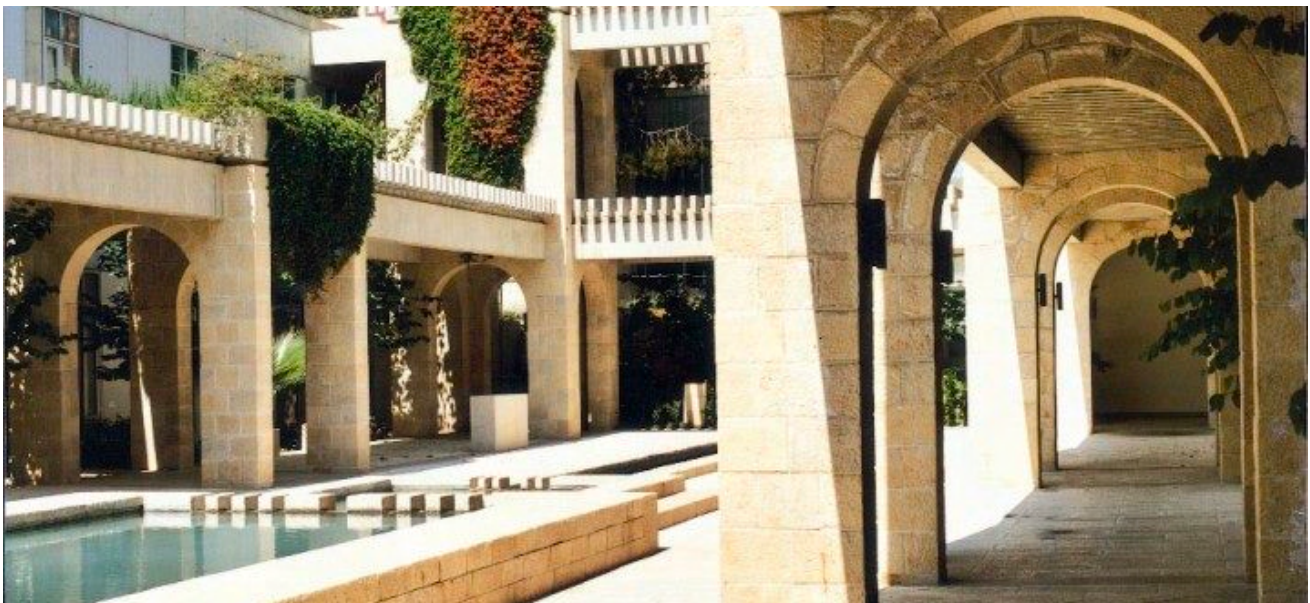
Israel's Supreme Court is the **highest court in the Israeli judicial system**. The Supreme Court hears appeals of cases previously tried in Israel's District Courts. It also serves as the High Court of Justice, ruling on the legality of decisions made by State authorities, including the constitutionality of laws passed by the Knesset. **IRAC has appeared in the Supreme Court hundreds of times** and has had many victories overturning discriminatory legislation practices in the court.



Curious about the **interaction between the Supreme Court and the Knesset**? You can join a regular Supreme Court tour or explore The Life of a Law, a combined tour of the Supreme Court and Knesset.

HUC-JIR TAUBE FAMILY CAMPUS

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) is North America's leading institution of higher Jewish education and the academic, spiritual, and professional leadership development center of Reform Judaism. In 1970, HUC-JIR became the **first North American seminary to require all rabbinical students to spend their first year of study in Jerusalem**. In the early 2000s, IRAC helped HUC navigate Israeli bureaucracy to receive relevant pay property tax breaks.



HUC-JIR classroom courtyard. Photo by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Today, HUC-JIR's Jerusalem campus is where all of the school's North American rabbinic and cantorial students begin their studies. The campus **also serves as the headquarters for the Reform Movement in Israel**, including the World Union for Progressive Judaism, Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, and IRAC. Want to visit this beautiful campus? **Check HUC-JIR's website to schedule a tour**. When you're here, come say hi!

THE WESTERN WALL

IRAC Focus: Gender Segregation and Religious Discrimination at the Kotel

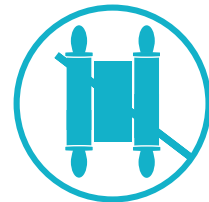
One place to visit while you're in Israel is **the Western Wall (the Kotel)** in the old city of Jerusalem. The Western Wall is the last standing vestige of the Second Temple, **the holiest site in Judaism - for all Jews**, and is the most visited site in Israel. Because the Western Wall is under the control of the ultra-Orthodox it is subject to their strict rules, there is:



A mechitza (a wall separating the prayer of men and women)



Severe, sometimes violent, harassment of women praying aloud, and mixed gender prayer is not allowed on the main plaza



An effective ban on Torahs in the women's section

There is an **egalitarian section of the Kotel**, known as Ezrat Yisrael, outside of the main plaza. As a result, many do not know it exists. It is not connected to the main plaza, and is only accessible by a steep staircase. There is no access to the wall itself from the egalitarian section.

Since the Western Wall is a **holy space for all Jews**, there should be an option for **pluralistic Jewish prayer**, not just the Orthodox model of prayer as it is now. IRAC represents the Reform Movement, the Conservative Movement, and Women of the Wall in advancing equality and freedom of religion at the Western Wall.

Thanks to their combined efforts, after years of negotiation, in 2016 the government passed the Kotel Agreement, which would create an egalitarian prayer space at Robinson's Arch. It would be connected to the main plaza of the Kotel, just as the men's and women's sections are now. However, after facing backlash over the Kotel Agreement from the ultra-Orthodox, the government froze the agreement and it was never implemented.



IRAC's Anat Hoffman holding up a Torah near the Western Wall.

In March 2022, after over five years of no cooperation from the government, for the first time since 2016, IRAC met with representatives of the 36th government of Israel, which spanned the political spectrum. Despite holding meetings with the Prime Minister, President, and Cabinet Secretary regarding the implementation of the agreement, no steps were made to follow through with the Western Wall Agreement.

IRAC continues to work towards the implementation of the Western Wall Agreement, the construction of an egalitarian prayer plaza, and equal treatment of progressive Jews at the Western Wall.

THE JERUSALEM OPEN HOUSE

Founded in 1997, the **Jerusalem Open House (JOH)** promotes equality and provides services for the LGBTQ community in Jerusalem. Due to a landmark Supreme Court decision in IRAC's petition on behalf of JOH, they enjoy municipal funding for their activities. IRAC continues to represent JOH in a number of petitions regarding discrimination against the LGBTQ community.

! Don't miss the **Jerusalem March for Pride and Tolerance!** IRAC is proud to provide legal support for JOH to ensure that this march continues to happen each year.



The Jerusalem March for Pride and Tolerance 2022

PLACES TO EAT

While visiting Israel, you have the right to be served at any restaurant. **It is illegal for restaurants to refuse service based on religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation.**



Kashrut is the Rabbinic certification of food being kosher according to Jewish law.

KASHRUT CERTIFICATION

A big issue in Israeli society is the **Kashrut laws that restaurants must follow** to receive certification. The Chief Rabbinate is the only organization in Israel authorized to grant Kashrut certification with the word "kosher", leading to a **monopoly over the rules of Kashrut** in the restaurant industry. This system has become corrupt and biased.



IRAC Case: Alternative Kashrut Certification

IRAC worked on a case that would **open the ability for a different kind of Kashrut license**. In 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that **businesses without Rabbinic certification can present as kosher under the supervision of a third party**, but they cannot use the word "kosher." This ruling paved the way for **more Kashrut certification possibilities**, supervised by groups like the Tzohar Rabbinic Authority. By forming other religious groups to offer Kashrut certification, liberal Jews are **creating a crack in the Chief Rabbinate's ultra-Orthodox monopoly** on Judaism in Israel.

RESTAURANTS

Restaurant owners **cannot refuse service** based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

IRAC Case: Refusal of Service Based on Sexual Orientation

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) requires first-year Rabbinical and Cantorial students to study on the Jerusalem campus. In August 2018, an HUC-JIR student named **Sammy Kanter** went to a local pizzeria while wearing a **Pride shirt**. An employee of the restaurant approached him and asked if he was gay. When Kanter responded yes, **the employee told him to leave**.



Sammy Kanter. Photo by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

IRAC worked with Kanter so that he could understand his rights and file a case against the pizzeria. With IRAC's help, **Kanter sued the pizzeria** under Israel's anti-discrimination law, and in March 2019, the court ordered the pizzeria to pay Sammy \$5,000 in damages. Kanter **donated his winnings to IRAC and other LGBTQ groups in Jerusalem**.

Kanter said, "When this incident first happened, I couldn't believe I was discriminated against for who I am in the place where all Jews are supposed to feel at home. After going through the trial and winning, I now feel like I truly belong here, to know that discrimination based on sexual orientation is truly against the law."

IRAC Case: Refusal of Service Based on Religion

In another case IRAC worked with **Dr. Mansour Khoury**, a **Christian-Arab emergency room physician** at Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikva. Dr. Khoury was on a break from a 26-hour shift and went to the hospital's Pizza Hut for a quick meal. **When the employee realized that he was wearing a cross, he demanded that Dr. Khoury hide his necklace.**

Dr. Khoury left and went to the head nurse. The two returned to the Pizza Hut, but **once again the employee refused to serve Dr. Khoury unless he hid his necklace. Dr. Khoury came to IRAC's racism crisis center to ask for help.** Together they addressed Pizza Hut's management to acknowledge this discrimination.



Dr. Mansour Khoury.

Pizza Hut refused to admit the racism, **IRAC helped Dr. Khoury to sue Pizza Hut.** At the court hearing, the head nurse Mr. Ibrahim shared, **"Today it's a cross, tomorrow a kippa.** He must provide service to everyone... I don't know what his problem was with the cross...I reported him in my daily report... I just want to say that **it doesn't have to happen like this."**

The judge decided that **Dr. Khoury's did not prove this was a case of discrimination, but Pizza Hut was wrong for denying him service.** Dr. Khoury reflected on the case, "The law was on my side, but the judge didn't rule in my favor. Thanks to IRAC, I was able to take this to court. **I will continue to fight...and will be prepared to record the incident the next time something like this happens."**



TAKE ACTION

While you are in Israel, it is important that you understand the food scene. **Know that wherever you go, you have the right to be served.** Additionally, try to research different restaurants and try new things while there.

Make sure to have some of the **must-have Israeli foods** such as Sabich, Falafel, Hummus, Shakshuka, Shawarma, and Knafeh, and **try some of the lesser-known specialties.** Look into different restaurants. Are they Kosher? **What kind of certificate do they have?** Try and see if the diverse types of certificates change how you feel about the restaurant. Look into **how you can use food to build a more pluralistic Israel.**

If you were denied service because of your gender, religion, sexual orientation or any other reason - document the incident and contact IRAC at pluralist@irac.org.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN ISRAEL

As the Jewish state, you have the unique opportunity to have a variety of religious experiences across denominations. It is important to note that there is no separation between religion and state. The Israeli government provides religious services, however it ascribes to a very narrow definition of Judaism, and the ultra-Orthodox Chief Rabbinate has a monopoly over religious public services. IRAC, as the preeminent organization promoting freedom of religion and religious pluralism, represents the non-Orthodox movements, congregations, and institutions in their struggle for recognition and equal access to government support.

Today, there are approximately 50 Reform congregations and 80 Conservative congregations throughout Israel. A rising number of Israelis chose to celebrate holidays and lifecycle events such as weddings and Bar or Bat Mitzvah in non-Orthodox synagogues. Interested in visiting a progressive synagogue during your visit, find a list here: <https://kbyonline.org/synagogues>.



IRAC Case: State-Funded Salaries for non-Orthodox Rabbis

An interesting thing about rabbis in Israel is that **they get paid by the State**. However, since the Rabbinate only recognizes Orthodox rabbis, **Reform and Conservative rabbis historically were not getting paid** by the Israeli government.

IRAC filed a case on behalf of **Rabbi Miri Gold, a Reform Israeli rabbi**. Rabbi Gold said **she was being discriminated against since she is not a male Orthodox rabbi** and that she should get paid the same.

Through Rabbi Gold's historic case, IRAC was able to achieve **state-funded salaries for Reform and Conservative rabbis in regional councils**, thereby creating another crack in the ultra-Orthodox monopoly over religious services. As a result, progressive rabbis now receive their salaries through Israel's Ministry of Sports and Culture.



Rabbi Miri Gold.

TAKE ACTION

While you are in Israel, **find a progressive synagogue and attend Shabbat or holiday services**. Additionally check out some of IRAC's resources about **religious pluralism and freedom**. Try and find somewhere to go for Shabbat dinner, whether it be an open restaurant or the home of a community member you are visiting. How similar is this experience to the one you are used to in the States? How different is it? **Use Shabbat to reflect on your experience so far in Israel.**

IMMIGRATING TO ISRAEL

By now, we hope you have had a chance to experience all of the beauty and complexity that is Israel. If after all of your experiences, you are interested in moving to Israel, IRAC's Legal Aid Center for Olim (LACO) is here to help. First, here are some **useful terms** to know:

- **Making Aliyah:** immigrating to Israel
- **Oleh:** immigrant (masculine)
- **Olim:** immigrants
- **Olah:** immigrant (feminine)

THE LAW OF RETURN

Under the **Law of Return**, all Jews have the right to obtain Israeli citizenship, as do:



People with at least one Jewish parent or grandparent



Spouses of Jews or anyone eligible for citizenship



People who have converted to Judaism

Israel actively encourages Jewish immigration and has absorbed over one and a half million immigrants over the past 20 years. For many immigrants, making Aliyah is a smooth process—particularly for immigrants who are white, from Western countries, and have very straightforward proof of Jewish lineage. However, **there are many immigrants who face bureaucratic challenges** from the Ministry of the Interior.

This is where LACO comes in. LACO, the only program of its kind, helps vulnerable immigrants navigate legal processes like confirming Jewish status, securing work permits, and getting healthcare. **With support from the best immigration lawyers in the country**, IRAC brings vulnerable immigrants a sense of promise, opportunity, and dignity. Since 1992, LACO has helped **over 100,000 immigrants**.



IRAC Case: Reform and Conservative Conversion

For many years, **Jews who converted to Judaism through non-Orthodox movements struggled to gain recognition as Jews under the Law of Return**. In 2005, the Supreme Court determined that Reform and Conservative conversions outside of Israel would be recognized under the Law of Return.

Conversions in Israel still were defined by the Chief Rabbinate's ultra-Orthodox. IRAC took the matter to the courts, working on the case for 15 years and filing ten petitions.

Finally, in 2021, IRAC won a landmark victory: The Supreme Court ruled that **people whose conversions were officiated and certified by the Reform and Conservative Movements in Israel would also be granted Israeli citizenship** based on the Law of Return. This decision marks a historic milestone in the pursuit of freedom and equality in Israel.

The government dragged its feet in implementing the court's decision, and **even demanded that converts leave the country!** Because of this, IRAC continues to advocate in the courts in order to ensure that all people who convert can find their home in Israel.



Erika (pictured left) moved to Israel in 2001, underwent a Reform conversion, and wasn't eligible for citizenship. She was diagnosed with cancer, and **because she wasn't a citizen, she had to pay for treatments out-of-pocket.** Erika has been on the waiting list since 2011. After an filing an appeal on her behalf, she was finally granted citizenship in July 2022!

As Judge Esther Hayut, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, stated in the 2021 ruling, "The purpose of the Law of Return is to encourage **any Jew—whether they were born as Jews, or chose to become part of the Jewish people through conversion—to make Aliyah (immigrate) to Israel.**"

TAKE ACTION

Research the immigration process and email LACO at laco@irac.org for support with any challenges in navigating the legal processes

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Interested in getting involved in IRAC's work? These are just a few ways that you can partner with IRAC in the pursuit of a just Israeli society:

✓ FINANCIALLY



Donate to IRAC



Join our Action Heroes Club, a monthly giving program that makes your valuable support go even further

✓ THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

Sign up for IRAC's newsletter: The Pluralist



Forward our newsletter to your friends and family and share it on social media

Like, comment, and SHARE our posts and tweets

Invite us to speak at one of your events (virtually or in-person)

Raise IRAC's core issues with any relevant boards with which you are involved

If you or your organization is traveling to Israel, please contact us at pluralist@irac.org. We would love to meet with you!

HEBREW WORDS TO KNOW

Language is the backbone of culture. Here are **10 words that make up a microcosm of Israeli culture** for when you arrive in Israel:

1 הארץ/חוץ לארץ (חוייל) HA-ARETZ/HUTZ LA-ARETZ (HUL)

You have arrived in Israel, a country which Israelis refer to as **HA-ARETZ**, literally meaning **the country/the land**.

Israelis then refer to everything outside of Israel as **HUTZ LA-ARETZ (HUL)**, literally meaning **outside of the country/the land**.

The concept that our country is **the country** gives you a big hint as to how Israelis view themselves in the world - with a somewhat ethnocentric view. You, as a non-Israeli, are therefore defined as **from outside the country**. You are fondly referred to as a **HULNIK** or **from HUL**.

2 LE-FAR-GEN לפרגן

LE-FAR-GEN means to compliment, positively reinforce, and lavishly shower another human being with admiration. Applauding the achievements of another doesn't come naturally to Israelis, therefore it is no coincidence that the word itself has its origins in Yiddish, not Hebrew. Paying tribute to the achievements of another goes against our national character. We hope you choose to embrace Israelis who are able LE-FAR-GEN others, particularly if they are from another tribe.

3 אקטואלי, אולטימטיבי, וירטואלי ואפגרייד AC-TU-A-LI/UL-TI-MA-TI-VI/VIR-TU-A-LI/UP-GRRRADE

If you listen carefully to a barrage of Hebrew speech, you may pick up on some words you know. They are just pronounced in the harsh pronunciation of Hebrew speakers.

Israelis may correct your pronunciation of "Washington Street" to "VASHINGTON", "MARLBORO" to "MALBORO", and LINCOLN Street is in fact "Rehov LINCOLEN". Correcting your English is an expression of a Hebrew word you know – HUTZPA.

4 FRA-I-ER פראייר

A FRA-I-ER is a sucker. It is someone who takes no for an answer. Someone who drives according to the rules of driving. Someone who pays full price. An Israeli will make every effort not to be a FRA-I-ER.

Immigrants who make Aliyah from the West are FRA-I-ERs by definition because why would anyone with any sense leave San Francisco to make their home in Kiryat Gat. You should be a proud FRA-I-ER. Show Israelis that it is acceptable to be a law-abiding citizen who knows how to stand in line and respect others. In fact, being a proud FRA-I-ER could be your single biggest contribution to the State of Israel (other than supporting IRAC, of course).

5 TIT-CHA-DESH/ TIT-CHA-DESHI תתחדש/ תתחדשי

Although the word sounds like a sneeze, it literally means **may you be renewed**. TIT-CHA-DESH (masculine) or TIT-CHAD-SHI (feminine) is the right thing to say when something is new. When someone buys a new article of clothing, a new car, gets a haircut, or a new phone. It is a lovely notion that a new object has the potential to renew us.

6 DOOG-RY דוגרי

DOOG-RY originates from Arabic and means straight. Israelis are known for speaking DOOG-RY – for telling you what they really think about everything (you included) to your face. Some people find it refreshing while some miss the enormous vocabulary of niceties used to smooth social relations in other languages. For example: "TIT-CHAD-SHI on the new job! What's the salary?"

7 A-VAR-NU ET PAR-OH עברנו את פרעה

Meaning we survived Pharaoh - we have prevailed in difficult situations.

If you are in a bus crossing the desert and suddenly all of the tires are flat, you're out of water, and there is no gas left, the thing to say is: "We survived Pharaoh, the holocaust, and terrorist attacks – we will survive this too."

8 DAI די

DAI, not to be confused with die, means enough or stop.

The word DAI may look and sound familiar as it is the shortened version of the word דיינו Dayenu from the Passover Haggadah.

Today, DAI is used to tell someone to stop doing something, that they've filled your cup with enough water, or to express shock or disbelief (often like this: DAAAAAAAAAAAAAII!) Israeli children must be warned not to say DAI when traveling to English-speaking countries as it is part of their regular vocabulary.

9 SAB-A-BA/ ACH-LA סבבה/ אחלה

SAB-A-BA and ACH-LA are synonyms for great or cool.

Both words were adopted from Arabic and some are two of the most used words in the Hebrew language.

10 YAL-LA BYE יאללה ביי

Originating in Arabic, YAL-LA BYE is how Israelis say goodbye.

YAL-LA BYE is the combination of the words YAL-LA, meaning **oh God** and used to say **let's go**, and BYE, from the English goodbye shortened from "**God be with ye**".

In essence, Israelis say goodbye in two languages that are not Hebrew.

GLOSSARY

Aliyah: Jewish immigration to Israel.

Ashkenazi Jews: Jews from Eastern Europe, present-day France, and the general area of present-day Germany.

Basic Laws: Sixteen constitutional laws written since 1950 in place of a formal Israeli constitution.

Basic Law of Human Dignity and Liberty: A 1992 law establishing that basic human rights are based on freedom and the recognition of the value of every individual. The Supreme Court can overrule any laws which contradict the tenets of this law, and many of IRAC's court cases rely on the law's principles.

Bedouin: A sub-group within the Arab population of Israel, making up approximately 4% of Israel's population. The majority live in the Negev desert.

Chief Rabbinate: The highest rabbinical authority in Israel by law, holding a monopoly over many aspects of religious life including marriage, divorce, and burial. The two Chief Rabbis – one Ashkenazic and one Sephardic – are both ultra-Orthodox and are elected every ten years.

Chasidism: A Jewish movement with roots in spiritual revival, noted today for its religious and social conservatism. Many ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews are members of this movement.

Halacha: The Jewish system of laws surrounding civil, criminal, and religious matters.

Haredi: Ultra-Orthodox, following a very strict version of halacha (Jewish law).

Israeli Defense Forces (IDF): The military force of the State of Israel. Service in the IDF is mandatory for all Israeli citizens for at least two years for women and three for men. However, Muslim and Christian Arab citizens, as well as Haredi Jews, are

currently exempt from serving.

Israel Movement for Progressive and Reform Judaism (IMPJ): The Israeli branch of the global Reform Movement. The IMPJ supports a network of about 50 progressive Israeli congregations and is the umbrella organization for all Reform organizations in Israel, including IRAC.

Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC): IRAC is the legal arm of the IMPJ (see above). It is dedicated to securing civil rights for a just and egalitarian Israel based on Israeli law and Jewish tradition.

Kashrut: A set of rules about which foods Jews are permitted to eat and how these foods must be prepared. Until recently, the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate held a monopoly over kashrut certification for all establishments in Israel that serve food. After the Supreme Court held a rare second hearing for IRAC's petition, it allowed for alternative kashrut certifications.

Ha'aretz: (lit. "the land") Israel.

Kotel: Also known as the Western Wall, the Kotel is the Western-most wall of the Temple Mount and is considered the closest site to the Holy of Holies. The Kotel is the most significant religious site for Judaism, and IRAC is working to make it a more egalitarian and pluralistic prayer site.

Law of Return: An Israeli law that gives Jews the right to obtain Israeli citizenship. Under the Law of Return, someone is considered Jewish if they have at least one Jewish grandparent or are married to a Jew.

Ministry of the Interior: The Israeli government ministry that oversees local government, citizenship, residency, identity cards, and visas.

Mizrahi Jews: Jews originating from Middle Eastern communities in Western Asia and North Africa, including Iraq, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, and Iran.

Oleh/olah/olim: Immigrant/s to Israel who make Aliyah within Israel's Law of

Return and receive Israeli citizenship.

Sephardic Jews: Jews originating mainly from the Iberian peninsula: Spain, Portugal, and areas like North Africa, to which many Jews from the Iberian peninsula fled in response to events like the Spanish Inquisition.

Union for Reform Judaism (URJ): One of IRAC's American partner organizations, representing and working to strengthen the largest Jewish movement in North America.



For additional resources, check out the terms in our online glossary: <https://www.iraac.org/glossary>

