

RA Shocked and Saddened by Clashes at Western Wall

May 10, 2013 | NEW YORK – In the wake of rioting by extreme, ultra-Orthodox segments of the Israeli population, resulting in violence against women seeking to pray according to their understanding of Jewish tradition and in accordance with Israeli law, Gerald Skolnik and Julie Schonfeld issued the following statement in response:

We are shocked and horrified to see the desecration of a Jewish holy site by Jewish religious extremists. We call for a full investigation by the Israeli government into the role of government salaried religious officials who called for thousands of people, especially youth to come to the Western Wall plaza, provoking hooliganism targeting fellow Jews and putting young boys and girls in a dangerous situation. We extend our thanks to the Jerusalem police for their professionalism and dedication this morning in protecting Women of the Wall and their supporters as they attempted to pray in accordance with the law, and Jewish tradition.

As we watch our sisters and brothers in Israel undertake a long awaited challenge to an entrenched system of political abuses, we look forward to the day when all Jews in Israel enjoy the rights to religious freedom in matters not only of worship, but birth, death, marriage and divorce. Sadly, it will take some time to unravel the net of religious coercion that has entrapped Israeli democracy. The courage and calm of Jerusalem police this morning is a positive sign of the civic and public discipline that will need to be exercised as justice and order is restored to the people of Israel.

We look forward to receiving an official version of a plan from Natan Sharansky, on behalf of the Prime Minister, resulting in two equal prayer sections consistent with the Supreme Court's directives to the government. In the intervening years, Conservative rabbis have provided egalitarian prayer space to 20,000 worshippers a year under challenging conditions at Robinson's Arch. They have done so by literally carrying all prayerbooks, scrolls, tables and necessary items to the site in order to allow Jews to pray in the Traditional egalitarian manner that respects all people equally.