

Annual Report 2006

2006 was yet another year of turbulence – the sudden disappearance of Sharon, the election of Hamas, the Lebanon War, the battering of Gaza...

In the Coalition of Women for Peace, we responded to these dramatic events, while pursuing our strategy of outreach to Israelis who do not share our views. It has been a year of non-stop activism for a just peace. We report here on some highlights.

Anti-War Activism

During the month of the Lebanon War, the Coalition of Women for Peace led the organizing to end the war and embark on negotiations for peace. Although other groups were also active, the Coalition brought out the largest constituency to the streets and also organized a range of media responses to the dominant military views.



A woman chants slogans at July 29 protest.

Small demonstrations were held daily in Haifa under fire; every Saturday night, we held a march through the streets of Tel Aviv – one of these, an impressive mass of women dressed in black. We also invited support from our international network, and groups in 90 cities around the world responded with solidarity actions.

The Coalition wrote and distributed thousands of leaflets explaining why this war was wrong, and printed stickers that rhyme (in Hebrew): “Children in Beirut and Haifa all want to live!” – emphasizing our support for the civilians on both sides.

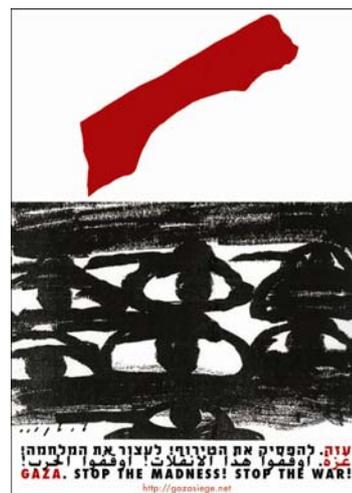
At first, our views were glaringly absent in the Hebrew media, dominated by generals and military men, but the Coalition media team worked hard, and soon our letters to the editor and op-eds became more visible. Indeed, women’s anti-war views were heard and even highlighted at times. When the consensus around the war did begin to crumble, Coalition actions provided one channel for expressing that dissent.

“Lift the Siege of Gaza!” Campaign

In the fall, when a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza was brought on by international sanctions and the relentless bombings by Israel, the Coalition of Women for Peace launched a month-long international campaign, “Gaza: End the Siege! End the War!”

We were joined by 17 other Israeli organizations and 107 groups worldwide, and together we held a series of actions and demonstrations – street theater, convoys to the Gaza border, candlelight vigils – culminating in mass actions on December 2 worldwide.

As part of our efforts to educate the public about the dire situation in Gaza, we held public lectures and a conference, issued informational leaflets and stickers, and hung dramatic posters created by David Tartakover, Israel's foremost political graphic artist [right]. A petition, "GAZA: Stop the Siege! Stop the War", garnered over 8,000 signatures internationally and was delivered to embassies in Israel and abroad.



Until this campaign, no significant voice had been raised to challenge the sanctions. Our campaign breached the wall of silence and placed on the international agenda the question of the counter-productivity and immorality of these measures. Although the sanctions were not lifted, Israel did ease the passage of goods into Gaza, and efforts continue.

Other Advocacy Activities

Silence the Cannons – Start Talking! Even before our special Gaza campaign, we engaged in a number of actions to draw attention to the dramatic increase of killing in Gaza as a result of Israeli shelling. These included demonstrations and vigils throughout the spring, and a mass rally in June to mark the anniversary of the occupation in 1967. We also placed a large ad in *Ha'aretz*, in which 8 other organizations joined us, calling upon the government to "Silence the Cannons – Start Talking!" .

Planting Trees, Building Bridges: The Coalition with 9 other organizations sponsored tree-planting in a Palestinian village to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat, when trees are traditionally planted. We also continued our empowerment project in the Salfit region, where Israeli and Palestinian women exchange lessons in Hebrew and Arabic. This activity is useful in its own right, and also builds a base for common political activities.



Stop the Wall! The Coalition maintained its ongoing participation in the weekly Bil'in demonstrations [photos by J. Katriel]. We also co-sponsored a large international conference in Bil'in on the theme of nonviolent resistance, organized together with the Bil'in Popular Committee and other peace organizations.



Vote for peace! Elections formed a part of our activities for the first 3 months of 2006, as Coalition women presented our demands for peace and equality in meetings with candidates from all the parties. A poster (that had been developed for the previous election) with the text "Vote for Peace" was placed on billboards throughout Israel.

➔ *Outreach to Israeli Audiences*

Russian-speaking Israeli women

Russian-speaking immigrants comprise over 20% of the Israeli population, and the Russian-language media in Israel often convey racist, extremist, and anti-Arab views. In 2006, the Coalition of Women for Peace continued and expanded its programming in this community to promote more democratic and peace-oriented views:

Large **weekend seminars** were regularly held in Jerusalem and Nazareth, offering lectures and discussion groups about current events [photo below]. Weekly **workshops** took place in the Haifa area, exploring the link between the personal and the political. And Russian-language “**reality tours**” were conducted of the Separation Wall and Arab towns in Israel – for most, the first encounter with Arab society.



The Coalition ran a Russian-speaking **theater** group, using drama to look at current issues; the group even wrote and performed a play, followed by avid audience discussion. The Coalition also sponsored one performance of a Russian play written that looks at the problems that arise when a Jewish woman from the Ukraine marries a Palestinian Israeli – a not uncommon occurrence. This was also followed by intense audience discussion.

Many Russian speakers in Israel use the Internet as their main source of information, so the Coalition launched www.perspektiva.co.il, a Russian-language website to provide news and translations of articles on a variety of issues – politics, environment, feminism.

The Coalition’s Media Project also trained Russian-speaking women for media work – to increase self-confidence during interviews and sharpen presentation skills. Because of this training and the empowerment work in the seminars and workshops, progressive voices have notably increased in the Russian-language media.

As a result, a new progressive voice has emerged in Russian, and many Russian-speaking women have begun to take part in other Coalition activities and member organizations.

Reframing Security

This campaign aims to broaden the understanding of security in Israel to include all aspects of ‘human security’ – a society that cares for its poor, reduces violence, protects its natural resources, and co-exists in peace with its neighbors. Indeed, this campaign seeks to instill the understanding that “peace is the best way to promote security”.

The annual “Herzliya Conference” held in Israel is dominated by the powerful in politics, business, and the military. The Coalition, together with Isha L’Isha, ran an alternative conference called **“Security – For Whom?”** in which women discuss the range of issues that we believe should be part of the security discourse – education, poverty, health, trafficking in women, the Arab minority in Israel, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This conference is an opportunity to showcase the fact that these issues are part of security, and also demand a role in the decision making about foreign affairs, today dominated by military men. The January event drew a great deal of media attention [photo: Netta Amar, lawyer and Mizrahi rights activist].



Articles by Coalition women about “What is Security” were placed in many outlets, giving **good media exposure** to our view of security. The Lebanon War also provided opportunities to ask publicly whether this war was enhancing or harming our security. **Position papers** were written about the relationship of security to other issues – economics, sexual violence, disengagement, militarization, etc. These papers were then merged into one overall analysis, and used for presenting to politicians and other policymakers, especially during the election campaign early in the year.

Reality Tours

“Reality tours” are designed to attract people who have never seen the ills of occupation – the Separation Wall, checkpoints, etc. – and create an atmosphere that allows participants to rethink previous beliefs. The tours are conducted in Hebrew or Russian and attract a wide diversity of people from the political spectrum. They have won international attention as a successful form of outreach, and were presented at international conferences in Israel and abroad.

This program will be expanded in 2007 and become part of our Reframing Security Campaign, helping us show the connection among the issues – politics, economics, and fundamental human and social rights.

Public Education

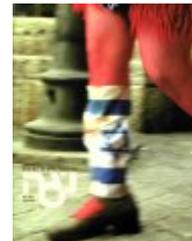
The Coalition held public education events about issues of concern to us. Highlights:

- 🚩 “Fascism – in Israel?”, with four speakers from academia and activism, followed by a film about Fascism in Spain in the 1930s.
- 🚩 “Women’s Work, Men’s Money” in venues throughout Israel (in Hebrew and Russian).
- 🚩 Led by Isha l’Isha, the Coalition co-sponsored a public event to promote UN Resolution 1325 with the participation of a Sri Lankan activist, who talked about her experience implementing this resolution in Sri Lanka.

The Coalition was also the main organizer behind the new **Gay-Lesbian Activist Festival**, held for a weekend in June with 500 people attending. The point of the festival was to raise awareness among gay men and women about the range of political repression, homophobia being only one.

➡ *Capacity Building – Support for Member Organizations*

Financial support: In 2006, the Coalition raised approximately \$150,000 for projects of its member organizations. These programs range from empowering young Arab women to a new, online version of Noga feminist magazine, to appear soon at <http://www.noga-magazine.org>. [photo right, provocative Noga cover – a flag-sock]



Media support: The Media Project of the Coalition serves not only the Coalition, but also our member organizations, gaining critical media exposure for their views and activities. In 2006, the Coalition organized a 6-meeting training course, “Working with the Media”*, that gave basic tools to progressive activists to become spokespersons for their causes. The Coalition also successfully lobbied Channel 2 and its sponsor to devote an episode of its series “Against All Odds” to one of the MachsomWatch activists. We also arranged for the filming of five women activists for broadcast on the website ACTV.

Website: The Coalition runs a 3-language website (Hebrew, English and Arabic): <http://www.coalitionofwomen.org>. This website gives information about activities of the Coalition and its member organizations, and also provides web pages to member organizations that do not have their own, and links to those that do. Thanks to this website and a committed, tri-lingual webmistress [Rima Abboud – photo, left], many more people hear about the activities of the member organizations. Website statistics indicate an average 20,000 “visits” a month this year, up from 11,000 in 2005.



➡ *Other Coalition Activism*

Social Justice Activities

The Coalition is an active member of the **Forum Against Unemployment**, which advocates for just economic, social, and environmental policies by the government. Thanks to intensive efforts by the Forum and allied organizations, budget cuts were not passed in 2006 that would have harmed the funding of preschool education for sick children, payments to widows in common law marriages, and housing benefits to the poor. The Forum also conducted important public education events to raise public awareness. At the Business Conference in December, an annual gathering of Israel’s wealthy and powerful, a Coalition woman spoke of the moral and practical importance of just economic policies. The Coalition was also one of the founders of **Tzedek** [‘justice’], formed after the Lebanon War to demand government attention to poverty.

* This course was given by Agenda: Israeli Center for Strategic Communications.

Bedouin summer camp: This summer in the Palestinian town of Anata, the Coalition sponsored 2 daycamps for children – 75-100 children in each [photo, left].



These camps were funded by the Coalition and run by a Coalition activist as part of the Olive Tree Campaign. The children engaged in arts and crafts, sports, traditional Bedouin dancing, and activities teaching them good health and hygiene practices – what to do in case of snake or scorpion bites (a not infrequent occurrence).

Young women's group: This forum brings together progressive young women – Jewish and Arab, most in their 20s – to explore, “How can our generation imprint its understanding of democracy and justice on Israeli society?” During the Lebanon War, this forum was instrumental in organizing the anti-war activism. Many of these women also participated in a media workshop this year, learning skills of interviewing, writing for publication, and developing a media strategy.

Raging Grannies: The Coalition's group of women over age 65 who write and perform political satire in song appeared frequently at political events and 3 times on national TV, offering a biting but humorous critique of government policies [photo right].



It was an amazing year – thank you to all our friends and supporters!

How to Make a Contribution

- ❖ Write a check (€ \$ or £) to “Coalition of Women for Peace” and mail it to P.O. Box 10252, Jerusalem, Israel 91102.
- ❖ For a US-tax deduction (minimum \$100), make out a check to “New Israel Fund”. Write in the memo line that it is for the Coalition of Women for Peace, and mail it to NIF, 1101 14th Street NW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20005-5639.
- ❖ For a UK-tax deduction (minimum 70 GBP) make out a check to "New Israel Fund", write on the memo line that it is for the Coalition of Women for Peace, and mail it to New Israel Fund, 25-26 Enford Street, London W1H 1DW.
- ❖ For a Netherlands-tax deduction, deposit into the bank account of Stichting Ontwikkeling Mondiaal Leiderschap, Javakade 162, 1019 RW Amsterdam, account 697683222, writing on the memo line: “Education program of the Coalition of Women for Peace”.
- ❖ For a Swiss tax benefit, make out a check to "Neuer Israel Fonds Schweiz", write on the memo line that it is for the Coalition of Women for Peace, and mail it to NIF-Schweiz, Postfach 425, CH-4010 Basel. Or deposit to Postscheckkonto 40-37333-1.
- ❖ Or from anywhere, you can make a wire transfer directly into our bank account: Israel Discount Bank, Hamoshava Branch #062, 21 Emek Refaim St., Jerusalem, Israel. Beneficiary: Coalition of Women for Peace. Account Number: 967017-512400. Swift Code: IDBLILIT 062. From Europe: IBAN No. IL 011062 967017 512400.