

**REFORM RABBIS ISSUE STATEMENT OF OUTRAGE AT ISRAEL'S SEXIST
ARREST OF WOMAN FOR HOLDING TORAH AT WESTERN WALL***Largest Group of Jewish Clergy Says Arrest Shows that Israel is at a Moral Crossroads*

JERUSALEM and NEW YORK CITY (July 13, 2010) – The world's largest group of Jewish clergy, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), issued a statement strongly condemning the arrest by Israeli police of a woman for holding a Torah while worshiping at Jerusalem's Western Wall, the holiest sacred site in Judaism.

The woman, Anat Hoffman, is the Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center and chairperson of Women of the Wall, a group of Israeli and Jewish women from around the world who seek the right for Jewish women to conduct prayer services, read from a Torah scroll while wearing prayer shawls and sing out loud at the Western Wall. Ms. Hoffman was taken into police custody after allegedly defying the Israel High Court ruling that outlaws women from reading from the Torah at the Western Wall. She was subsequently released.

The CCAR said its members, the world's Reform rabbis, "...look with shock and revulsion at today's arrest of Anat Hoffman... We view her arrest, interrogation and subsequent ban from visiting the Western Wall for a month...a desecration of God's name..." The statement also said, "After 62 years of statehood, Israel stands at a moral crossroads. Will the Jewish state continue to bar women from equal access to Torah in our most sacred places, or will it foster the free and equal expression of Judaism for men and women alike? Will Jewish life in Israel breathe the free air of religious freedom, or will it continue to be stifled in the choking air of an anachronistic and state-empowered rabbinic fundamentalism?.."

To arrange a conversation with a CCAR spokesperson or for further information, please contact Itay Engelman at Sommerfield Communications, Inc., at 212-255-8386 or itay@sommerfield.com.

The full statement from the CCAR is below:

***CCAR STATEMENT ON THE ARREST OF ANAT HOFFMAN
July 12, 2010***

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the world's oldest and largest rabbinic association, looks with shock and revulsion at today's arrest of Anat Hoffman of "Women of the Wall" for the purported "crime" of holding a sefer Torah in the women's section of the Western Wall during a Rosh Hodesh celebration. We view her arrest, interrogation, and subsequent ban from visiting the Western Wall for a month as acts of "hillul hashem," a desecration of God's name,

for they bring public shame and ridicule down upon those responsible for her arrest and upon the Judaism they purport to defend.

After 62 years of statehood, Israel stands at a moral crossroads. Will the Jewish state continue to bar women from equal access to Torah in our most sacred places, or will it foster the free and equal expression of Judaism for men and women alike? Will Jewish life in Israel breathe the free air of religious freedom, or will it continue to be stifled in the choking air of an anachronistic and state-empowered rabbinic fundamentalism? Will Israel's greatest strength, that of being a modern democracy, be undercut by an increasingly ubiquitous medieval theocracy? At a time when the eyes of the world are focused on Israel, will the face Israel presents be tolerant and egalitarian, or intolerant and sexist?

In light of these recent events and the ever-creeping hegemony of ultra-Orthodox agendas, we renew our call for the disestablishment of the Chief Rabbinate.

We commend the Women of the Wall for its holy work and pledge our support of its efforts.

We commend Anat Hoffman for her courageous and her tireless efforts on behalf of religious freedom, pluralism, and equal rights in Israel.

We call upon the majority of our Jewish Israeli sisters and brothers who believe in democracy and religious pluralism to stand up and declare "dai kfar" – we have had enough of haredi coercion in our lives and in the religious life of our nation.

We affirm that the visions of being both a Jewish state and a modern democracy are inexorably intertwined and interdependent.

We once again pledge our finest efforts to supporting Israel as a Jewish and democratic state as it reflects the highest aspirations of Judaism and the Jewish people and, in doing so, brings sanctity and honor to God's great and holy name.

About the Central Conference of American Rabbis

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, founded in 1889, is the oldest and largest rabbinic organization in North America. As the professional organization for Reform Rabbis of North America, the CCAR projects a powerful voice in the religious life of the American and international Jewish communities. Since its establishment, the CCAR has a rich history of giving professional and personal support to Reform rabbis, providing them opportunities for study, professional development and spiritual growth beginning while they are still in seminary, through mid-careers, and into retirement. The CCAR is uniquely positioned to meet the ongoing needs of its nearly 2,000 member rabbis (virtually the entire Reform rabbinate) and the entire Reform Jewish community. For more information please visit the CCAR's website at <http://ccarnet.org/>.