

NCJWA PLEA TO ISRAEL

'Respect, protect women'

REBECCA DAVIS

FOLLOWING reports of a horrific gang rape of a 16-year-old girl at a resort in Eilat last month, the National Council of Jewish Women Australia (NCJWA) has penned a response, calling on the Israeli government to commit to a series of measures.

In a letter addressed to deputy chief of mission at the Israeli Embassy in Australia Dr Ron Gerstenfeld, and outgoing Australian Ambassador to Israel Chris Canaan, NCJWA has urged Israel to "ensure appropriate services are available to support all victims of sexual violence, independent of whether the violence takes place in public or private; and ensure that perpetrators are promptly brought before the courts and punished according to the law."

It also called for the introduction of "educational and other measures to reorient the society to ensure that women are deeply valued and respected members of society".

Many Israelis were enraged by the alleged Eilat incident, with 2000 people protesting at Tel Aviv's Rabin Square.

The NCJWA letter read: "The gang rapes in Cyprus and in Eilat are deeply troubling. Sexual violence against women is never acceptable and these incidents betray a deep lack of respect



Israelis demonstrate in Tel Aviv following the alleged gang rape of a teenage girl in Eilat last month.

Photo: Tomer Neuberger/Flash90.

for women and girls in Israel. There is no doubt an erosion of the valuing of women when such instances occur. The Jewish women of Australia feel equally strongly about these issues and seek to understand what action is being taken."

The letter also cited the sharp increase in cases of domestic violence during COVID-19, and failure to provide a gett as "forms of violence ... issues [that] must be seen as part of the problem to be addressed."

Speaking with *The AJN*, NCJWA president Melinda Jones said: "Violence against women is never acceptable – whether in Australia, Israel or elsewhere. It is the government's responsibility to protect women from being violated, humiliated, intimidated and harassed.

"Action must be taken immediately to validate women and to end degradation."

SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS SILENCED

'It's such an insult'

REBECCA DAVIS

SURVIVORS of sexual abuse in the Jewish community were left feeling "shame" and "re-traumatised" following changes to Victoria's Judicial Proceedings Reports Act that silences victims from speaking out.

Quietly enacted in February, the amendments have made it an offence to publish the identity of sexual assault victims – regardless of their consent – in all cases where the offender has been found guilty, and where charges have been laid and proceedings are still pending. The only exemption is if the victim applies for and is granted a court order. Should the new laws be broken, individuals found guilty face up to four months in jail and fines.

As a result of the amendments, alleged sexual abuse victims Dassi Erlich, Elly Sapper and Nicole Meyer were left no other option than to seek a court order. They appeared before the Melbourne Magistrates' Court via online on Wednesday when their application was approved, granting them permission to publicly speak their truth once more.

"Our choice to speak has been restored! It was an instrumental decision that will set a precedent and hopefully pave the way for other survivors to own and share their story," said Erlich.

The three sisters were allegedly



Alleged sexual abuse victim Dassi Erlich.

Photo: Peter Haskin

abused by their former principal at the Adass Israel School, Malka Leifer. On September 21, a decision will be handed down on whether Leifer will be extradited from Israel to face 74 charges of child sexual abuse.

Speaking on the amendments, Erlich said: "It sends a message of shame to victims who choose to tell their story. The government does not have the right to choose how and when victims tell their story."

Echoing Erlich's sentiments, child sexual abuse survivor Dassi Herszberg said that on hearing the news, she "initially took on those feelings of shame again. It was absolutely triggering and re-traumatising in a way that I reverted back to that child."

"I then felt incensed by the injustice, and was staggered by

the incompetency of politicians in allowing this to pass.

"We're being asked to 'apply' to speak – on something that happened to us? It's such an insult, and so patronising."

Erlich shared that she received phone calls from Premier Daniel Andrews and Attorney-General Jill Hennessy last week. By Friday, Hennessy announced that urgent reforms will be fast-tracked in parliament this year, meaning the majority of victims won't require a court order to tell their stories if they have given informed consent to being identified.

Caulfield MP David Southwick called the legislative change "deeply concerning", charging "the State Governments failure to act, despite being fully aware of these issues for months, is simply unacceptable".

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