

UN women are failing their Jewish sisters at IWD events

By LYNDA BEN-MENASHE

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How appropriate that it landed in my junk folder. The email telling me that the headline speaker at the UN Women Australia International Women's Day Luncheon I'd paid \$199 to attend was Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland.

Robinson's legacy will be forever entwined with the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban.

There, as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, she presided over what was later called "the worst international manifestation of anti-Semitism since WWII".

A conference disgraced by virulent [anti-Semitic behaviour](#) facilitated by the organisers. A watershed event in the long, dishonourable history of UN institutions being weaponised against Israel and the Jewish people.

Robinson admitted that "there was horrible anti-Semitism present – particularly in some of the NGO discussions. A number of people said they've never been so hurt or so harassed or been so blatantly faced with anti-Semitism."

My cousin Tamar led the South African Jewish caucus, and calls the conference the worst experience of her life.

Australia was one of 38 countries that boycotted the 20th anniversary of the conference, citing concerns of anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias.

Recently, Robinson supported the case South Africa brought to the [UN's International Court of Justice](#), which charged Israel with genocide.

On January 26 the court brought down a provisional measures ruling that did little more than remind Israel to adhere to the Genocide Convention.

Joan Donoghue, the ICJ president who delivered the ruling, said: “I’m correcting what’s often said in the media – (the ICJ) didn’t decide that the claim of genocide was plausible.”

Far from the outcome that South Africa and Mary were hoping for.

To me and millions of other Jewish people, the 2001 conference in Durban enabled the first step in the post-Holocaust resurgence of Jew hatred now engulfing the world.

This conference led to the daubing of “F..k the Jews” on the wall of an apartment block in Woollahra I used to live in, to attempted arson at the synagogue I grew up in, and to a caravan of explosives found in Sydney intended for a building I used to work in.

Obviously I didn’t know Robinson would be the headline speaker when I bought my ticket to the UN Women Australia’s lunch.

The theme of the lunch and of IWD itself this year is “March Forward ... For ALL [sic] Women and Girls”.

I’m in New York right now and like that iconic New Yorker Carrie Bradshaw, “I couldn’t help but wonder” if any UN Women watched 29-year-old Israeli hostage Arbel Yehud “March Forward” out of 482 days of bondage in Gaza last week.

Arbel shuffled in terror through a sea of Hamas and Palestinian Jihad armed terrorists spitting hate and snapping photos on their phones. No Palestinian women were visible in the sea of toxic masculinity.

I couldn’t help but wonder if any international feminist group might take a minute away from their obsession with micro-aggressions at corporate water coolers to comment on the undeniable misogynistic macro-aggressions of the monstrous tableau. None has, to my knowledge.

UN Women did make a general statement on the day the ceasefire and hostage release schedule was announced. About Israeli women it said – without using the word Israeli – that “the news of the initial release of hostages brings immense relief to them and their families”. About Gazan women – mentioned four times – long paragraphs detailing their plight. Every reference to Palestine and Israel put Palestine first.

My organisation first asked UN Women Australia soon after October 7, 2023, to mention the plight of the Israeli women raped, massacred and abducted.

We’ve asked a number of times since. Each time they’ve said they couldn’t. They felt bad, of course; Hamas are monsters, of course; but policy is set from on high, etc. They’d be in touch should the situation change, etc. But no matter how many times the situation did change, they never made a statement.

So I shouldn’t be surprised they chose as their headline speaker the woman whose lack of principle and care at Durban has led us to this point. Is it a conspiracy that they are platforming her? Abysmal ignorance? Or a similar lack of principle and care? It’s certainly exclusionary feminism, in which #ALLwomen doesn’t include Jewish or non-Jewish Zionist women like me.

Sharing the stage with Robinson at IWD events across Australia are Celeste Barber, Maria Thattil, Madison de Rozario, Suzy Urbaniak, Dr Carmen Lawrence, Professor Lyn Beazley and the Governor-General, Sam Mostyn.

Back in October 2023, Thattil rightly called out internet trolls slamming her for not speaking publicly about Israel/Palestine.

She said she wanted to “do her research” first, and criticised people for not doing the same.

Perhaps Thattil didn’t do her research about Robinson.

If she did, I’m disappointed she accepted the gig.

What I would say to her, and all the speakers, is that this is a moment in history in which to think carefully about who you share a platform with, and in which moral

direction that platform is facing.

I'll be asking UN Women Australia to refund my \$199.

I'm going to donate it to an organisation called Victims of Terrorism Australia, founded by an Australian feminist hero of mine, Caroline O'Hare.

Caroline is a retired member of the Counter-Terrorism Command of the NSW Police Force and I think she should be up on that stage instead of Mary Robinson.

I'll be making the donation in the name of [Arbel Yahud](#).

Lynda Ben-Menashe is president, National Council of Jewish Women Australia.

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