

## PURIM PRESS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Adar Bet 5760 -- This Purim, the silencing of women in the Jewish community sounds loud amidst the cacophony of yells and groggers. Jewish Women Watching (JWW), the notorious anonymous action group, has taken Jews to task for their failure to nurture and celebrate women who speak out for themselves, for women's issues and for the entire community.

Over the last two days, some 1500 leaders in all corners of the Jewish world – religious communal, academic, philanthropic, literary, media, activist, social service, political, business, educational -- received a decidedly unique "chag sameach." In innocuous brown paper envelopes marked only by "Jewish Women Watching," an email address (jewishwomenwatching@hotmail.com) and the JWW trademark \_chamsa\_, came specially designed Purim groggers with directions to drown out sexism in the Jewish community along with the name of Haman. Thousands of others received email and fax versions of the card.

As per the JWW signature style, the power of this package lies in its straight-forwardness. On the groggers' faces are the words "Drown Out Sexism" in bold blue lettering large enough to be readable even when spun at full throttle. The accompanying card, with images of antique groggers and the words "Chag Purim Sameach" in Hebrew and English transliteration, lets the message stand out:

Every Purim, Jews unite to drown out Haman's name. This year we suggest a few more reasons to make noise.

In the era of the Persian Empire, Esther spoke on behalf of the entire Jewish people. Since then, only one woman has delivered the "State of World Jewry Address" at the 92nd Street Y.

Vashti's not the only woman who had to strip to keep her job. Even in the Jewish world, three out of four women endure sexual harassment in the workplace.

At a Megilla reading, we'll spin our groggers 50 times to blot out Haman's name. That's more than the number of women on the boards of the Anti Defamation League and United Jewish Communities combined.

Rabbis agree that without Esther's intervention Haman would have murdered all the Jews. With almost no women in the top five executive positions at national Jewish organizations, what might befall today's Jewish community?

Vashti spoke for herself.  
Esther spoke for herself.  
We too must refuse to be silent.

This Purim, drown out sexism.

## Jewish Women Watching

"I'm sure, for many, the message is harder to swallow than month-old hamentashen," mused a JWW member who like all, spoke only on condition of anonymity. "But those who really care about the future of the Jewish community should understand that by not promoting women to executive positions, not confronting the pervasiveness of sexual harassment, not choosing women speakers and not recognizing women's and girls' issues as community issues, we become agents of our own demise."

Reflected another sister in the renegade organization of committed women, "JWW, as does the holiday of Purim, strives to keep alive the tradition of identifying and condemning injustice against the Jewish People. We celebrate Vashti's and Esther's strength and heroism, and we challenge the Jewish community to do the same in both word and action -- acknowledge, seek and snuff out sexism as vehemently as we do the name of Haman. Whether or not the Jewish community is more sexist than the general community is not the issue. The issue is that sexism IS a problem in the Jewish community, and we are determined to make change."

And making change they are. Already well known for the New Year's cards and newspaper ads summoning the Jewish community to atone for its sexism and a protest of the absence of women speakers in a New York Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) conference, the Purim action has sparked unprecedented buzz in Jewish communities worldwide. All this while maintaining complete anonymity, which, as one member explained, "allows us to serve as a collective voice of Jewish women. The point is not who we are, but that we could be any Jewish women in any Jewish community."

"How can we credit the courageousness and outspokenness of Esther and at the same time silence the Jewish women of today?" wondered another member. "Jewish Women Watching's Purim card is a call to drown out sexism. The provoking voices are clear and strong. It's time for the community to join in."

###