

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jewish Women Still Watching Strike Again with New Year's Action Against Sexism

Tishrei 5761 – As the gates close on 5760, the anonymous activist group Jewish Women Watching struck again this week with a campaign similar to the one that launched them a year ago. More than 2500 staff and lay leaders of Jewish communal organizations, as well as rabbis, teachers, elected officials and members of the press, received Rosh Hashana (New Year) greeting cards bearing the group's no-frills tagline: Sexism is a sin.

The cards mark Jewish Women Watching's fourth public action. Following last year's Rosh Hashana campaign, the group protested the under-representation of women at a Jewish Community Relations Council conference, "Changing Realities: The New York Jewish Community in the 21st Century." And in the spring, Jewish communal leaders were surprised to receive Purim groggers (noisemakers) in their mailboxes carrying a "Sexism is a sin" sticker.

"We had planned only to mail that first New Years indictment and then to disband," confided a member of Jewish Women Watching. "But the more we learned about the treatment of women in the Jewish communal world, the more we realized the necessity of bringing these issues to light. Only when changes have been made—like women receiving equal pay and being proportionately represented in Jewish organizational life—will we stop agitating."

The 5761 New Years card features a photograph of a gateway and warns in bold "The day of judgement has arrived. None will be exempt from justice's eyes." Mirroring the liturgy of the Unatenah Tokef—the central litany of the Jewish High Holy Days that reflects the seasonal themes of tzedakah, t'shuvah and tefilah (charity, repentance and prayer)—the inside of the card reads:

On Rosh Hashana it is written,
and on Yom Kippur it is sealed...

How many women will be credited for their ideas, and how many men will be lauded for a woman's idea?

According to a study of over 100 major Jewish lay leaders, women's ideas are repeatedly attributed to men.

How many national Jewish organizations will choose women for top executive positions, and how many will continue to be run by men?

Of 50 organizations vital to American Jewish life, only 5 have a woman in the top executive position.

How many national Jewish boards will reach gender parity, and how many will still under-represent women?

On average, boards of national Jewish communal organizations are 75% male.

How many men will be exalted at annual Jewish dinners, and how many women will have organized those dinners?

Last year, only 1/6 of the individuals honored at Jewish organizational dinners were women.

How many women will be paid fairly, and how many will make 73 ¢ of their deserved dollar?

The highest paid female Jewish Federation executives make on average \$50,000 less than their male colleagues.

Only t'shuva, tzedakah and tefilah will annul the severity of the decree.

Sexism is a sin.

Jewish Women Watching

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Thousands of readers of the New York Jewish Week and the national Forward newspapers also found this message couched into the pages of their usually sweet New Year's issues. In a departure from last year's action, this year the group is also hitting Jewish organizations with a provocative fax campaign. Bombarding fax machines all over the nation during the week between Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Repentance)—the week set aside for repentance—the faxes, like the cards, urge the end of sexism within Jewish professional communities.

"The gates close in 5 days," warns the first fax, followed by a reiteration of the questions and answers provided in the card text.

As one member of Jewish Women Watching said, "Our renegade message will continue to reveal the sexist practices and behavior that have become so ingrained in the Jewish world. We're not afraid to point fingers, hurl facts and speak the truth about what women in our community experience."

It seems unlikely that Jewish Women Watching will ever reveal themselves, though. Once again, the group has thrown would-be detectives from their paths by mailing hand-addressed and labeled envelopes from both Brooklyn and Manhattan. A new post office box address listed in the card gives nothing away but does provide for the first time a mailing address where enthusiasts can contact—and support—the group.

“What else can we say to Jewish leaders and organizations?” asked a particularly questioning member of Jewish Women Watching. “Watch out! We’re watching you!”

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