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**Working to Promote 1325 in Israel:  
Opportunities and Challenges Facing  
Activist Women and Isha L'Isha**

**Paula Mills**

Feminist Activist

L'Isha-Haifa Feminist Center

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## Working to Promote 1325 in Israel: Opportunities and Challenges Facing Activist Women in Isha L'Isha

**Paula Mills**

**Paula Mills:** I'll say a little bit about myself. I moved to Israel 24 years ago and first became involved in the Haifa Feminist Center 10 years later, when I realized that there was very little feminist awareness in the rural area I was living in. Since 1983, the Haifa Feminist Center has been a leader in grassroots activism, working on issues of violence against women, women's representation in the public arena and participation in the economic sphere.

More recently, Isha L'Isha has taken the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and made it known in the state of Israel. This all started in 2002, by a very small group of feminist activist women. Before this initiative there was no awareness of the resolution. In the Isha L'Isha publication "Where Are All the Women?" we explain what 1325 is.

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 in October 2000 to define armed conflict's impact on women and girls in many of the following ways: rape, domestic violence, denial of necessary services, lack of political influence, poverty, under-representation in the media, trafficking of women, STDs, etc. The resolution also acknowledges the importance of bringing a gender perspective into all peace agreement negotiations and stresses the important role of local women and of women's organizations in all conflict resolution efforts. The resolution reaffirms the Security Council's obligation to protect women and support the representation of peace processes as well as in local and global politics. It was adopted as a result of a long-term campaign on the part of international women's organizations and peace movements demanding that the UN bring a gender perspective into all peacekeeping operations and all levels of conflict resolution negotiations as well as guaranteeing the protection of women and girls. The adoption of Resolution 1325 by the UN Security Council reflects an international commitment to the representation of women's perspectives and needs and the recognition of women's unique role in achieving peace and justice.<sup>1</sup>

Well, they sometimes say that paper will absorb anything. Basically, the declarations and assumptions, and wishes of the women's community in advocating and passing this resolution were that it would somehow be a panacea; countries would sign on to the resolution, adopt it, and start to make changes. But since there was no enforcement mechanism within the resolution – no means of forcing governments to do anything about the fact that women had unique needs, or to do anything about the fact that women were not represented at any levels of negotiations, or the fact that women's organizations

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<sup>1</sup> Ahahoni, Sarai and Rula Deeb. "Introduction." *Where are All the Women? UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Gender Perspectives of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*: 5-6. Available at: <http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/OPT/IshallIsha1325Report2003.pdf>.

working for peace within their own countries were not recognized, funded, or supported – nothing changed in any areas of international dispute. Resolution 1325 was basically something you could hang up on a wall and say it existed, but unless women’s organizations were going to take it and move forward with it, it would mean little.

One of the very first things that Isha L’Isha did in 2002 was to translate the resolution into Hebrew, because nobody knew what it was; nobody had heard of it. Isha L’Isha women were first introduced to 1325 in October 2002, when a delegation of activist leaders went to Guadalajara, Mexico for the Association of Women in Development (AWID) international forum. At the time, the second intifada that had been going on for two years, and it was affecting the women in the organization, since Isha L’Isha was a feminist organization for Jewish and Arab women. Violent conflict had never been an issue that was part of Isha L’Isha’s core mission; Isha L’Isha was a feminist organization that defined itself as campaigning for what are considered ‘feminist women’s issues.’ But women came back from AWID and said, “This is it, this is our opportunity. Now we can look at all of the work we are doing in the feminist arena, and see how we, as a women’s center, are affected by the government’s cutbacks in the social areas due to funding the conflict, and at how being part of a country which is in ongoing conflict really must be considered part of the women’s agenda.”

In other words, the patriarchal militarist establishment holds the conflict and the security issues as something that only belongs to the men who are running the government and who are running the conflict. And in their eyes, women can only relate to issues that have to do with women in the local sphere, whether it’s personal security issues or issues of women’s rights. In an effort to change this, Isha L’Isha women said, “We can take 1325 and begin to look at another aspect of our lives and expand our activism work.”

So, we began to study 1325 amongst ourselves, and then with women who were key in other organizations. It’s not enough to have a statement in an international arena saying, “We demand that women be part of peace negotiation;” you have to take that statement and then you have to look at your own reality. You look at the women who are sitting in the room, and look at the women who are in your government, and you look at the women who aren’t in your government, and say, “Okay, if we want women to be part of a peace negotiation process, *which* women are going to be there? Are they going to be the women who are very interested in career advancement in politics and aren’t self-defined feminists – women who don’t care about a feminist agenda, who want to be like the men? Are they going to be women in the Israeli army who have risen up the ladder and are unaware of the feminist agenda as they go into negotiations? By feminist agenda, I mean women’s different roles in society; women’s economic marginalization; the threats to women’s daily livelihood because of budget cutbacks; the threats women face because of being single women, because of race, religion, ethnicity or other divisions within our society. Are the women we are trying to get into peace negotiations going to be aware of other kinds of issues? Who’s going to deal with them? We asked these questions and studied these issues in the process of planning a conference about 1325.

We worked on planning the conference for four months, and during the course of the planning itself, realized that many of our goals were being achieved because we started

telling women in other organizations that 1325 existed. We'd call up an organization in Jerusalem and say we were working on 1325 and they would ask, "What's 1325?" So then we began to educate and talk to other women. Then we learned that there was another group working on 1325 that we should mention: Jerusalem Link, an organization linking two women's centers – Bat Shalom in East Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem Center for Women in West Jerusalem. And these women from the Link were already working cooperatively across national lines to discuss and protest the violent conflict in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine. Their current goal was to establish an International Women's Commission outside of the State that would work with the Quartet<sup>2</sup> and create a commission in which women would be involved in helping resolve the conflict. I don't know where the international commission is now, but I know they are funded by UNIFEM [United Nations Development Fund for Women] and had a recent meeting in Turkey. These activist women are not working in the country to implement 1325, but are looking to the international arena to help them promote the implementation of the resolution.

Now, when Isha L'Isha actually held its first conference on implementing 1325, on April 8, 2003, there were over 100 women and men there. The day the conference took place, there was an incredible sense of energy and excitement – this resolution was something nobody had ever talked about. There was a sense that women had come to a new land. Suddenly we had a new tool and a new vision that we were going to take with us; we would examine and analyze how women's lives were affected by the conflict, and how each and every one of our lives – the lives of Jewish women from different sectors and communities, Arab women, Palestinian women who were citizens of Israel and of the Occupied Territories – were affected on a daily basis by the fact that the UN Resolution 1325 has not been achieved. By the fact that women's rights aren't recognized, women's needs aren't recognized, women aren't involved in negotiating for peace, and women's peace movements are completely invisible in the media.

We published a book after the conference called "Where Are All the Women " and in it we included the speeches given that day to show how women's rights were being ignored and how women were being kept out of the peace process. Basically anything you want to know about 1325, through different feminist analyses, can be found in this book. It was a joint effort by Kayan-Feminist Organization and Isha L'Isha, as was the conference itself. We translated these conference proceedings into Hebrew, English and Arabic. And there were many different things that came out of this: a legal perspective, a social perspective, and multiple perspectives from Palestinian and Jewish women.

Many different layers of discussion here got us thinking that if we want to implement this resolution, we have to look carefully at diversity. And that's the main thing that we wanted to do. We didn't want to implement a resolution that basically feeds into the way the patriarchy works, which sees the men in control, and the women being controlled by the men.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Quartet" refers to the four entities – the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations – that work to mediate the peace process in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

We don't see women as one single group. There are women from different groups with different voices, different colors, different races, and we want to make sure that everyone is represented.

After we held the conference and published the book, the steering committee decided that we should collect information about how women were feeling about the conflict and how it affected their lives. It was 2004 and we had been through four years of a violent intifada, in which we had experienced buses being blown up and all women's lives were being affected by tremendous budget cutbacks and changes in the political nature of the country. To collect this information, some of our activist women went and adapted a model of what had been done by Kvinna til Kvinna some years earlier in Bosnia-Serbia. Kvinna is a Swedish group – 'Women to Women' – and in their survey of women in Serbia and Bosnia asked a series of questions about their daily life. "Do you feel safe? What happens if you're unsure about your personal safety? What happens if your child is exposed to an incident of violence or sees violence in the media? Who talks to your child when these things happen? Have you been feeling worse or better lately – since the war is over or before the war started?"

These were a series of questions looking at how conflict affects women on a daily basis. How does it affect our functioning in society? Are we able to work to fulfill our goals? These are questions nobody asks. They assume that if there's a conflict, or if there's a war, or if there's a situation where there is insecurity, that we basically look at the conflict as something we must accept. We women don't sit in positions of power, we can't make many changes, we don't have the resources that men have when they sit in the army or government, and therefore we have to accept it and basically swallow our pride.

What we wanted to do by giving women this questionnaire was to show women that their lives *were* affected, and to arouse a sense of understanding that something was happening and nobody had identified what it was. That something was that women were playing a role in perpetuating the ongoing crisis by not questioning it, not seeing it, not exposing it as something undesirable in their lives. We did this questionnaire with about 550 women from different sectors of Israel. We went to the south where there's a marginalized border area that has experienced daily bombing and violence. We went to Arab women in Israel and we translated the questionnaire into Arabic and made it sensitive to the Arabic community. We didn't ask certain questions that were included for Jewish women that would've been offensive or not understood (such as, "How would you feel when your husband was away in army service?"). So we made the questionnaire sensitive to all the different groups we presented it to.

Collecting data for the questionnaire was something we thought about strategically, and we involved other organizations in the process of data collecting. We went to speak to human rights groups about collecting data for the survey, and realized that all these groups – whether it was Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Physicians for Human Rights, Oxfam, or NATAL (the Israeli Trauma Center for Victims of Terror and War) – had no gender perspective on anything they did. One group agreed to collect data from people who called in (there is a hotline for people who were traumatized by either having served in the army or having family members in the army), and they discovered

that none of their statistics even categorize if callers were male or female! There was also no gender perspective in the human rights or humanitarian assistance organizations.... If there's no water in a community, it's going to affect the women differently than it's going to affect the men; women menstruate, women take care of children and elderly, and they need water to do their daily caring responsibilities, but the men running these organizations did not think about these issues. There was no gender analysis of anything that was happening in a conflict situation. So Isha L'Isha was going to organizations and giving workshops with their staff, saying, "Have you ever looked at the conflict from a gender perspective? Have you ever realized that there are different issues played out here?" And so we began educating other groups, in order to then make their work more sensitive to gender issues. This was another strategy we had of how we could take 1325 and bring it to more areas of society.

We had several conferences during the last three years; I already mentioned the first conference, which took place in 2003, where we began to touch on 1325 and all the major questions. The second took place on November 30, 2005 in Tel Aviv, in the center of the country. There, we talked about the questionnaire and the report we did about the proliferation of small arms. One of the things that happened during the Second Intifada was that many public places in Israel were protected by paid security guards who had guns. This proliferation of small arms was not controlled; sometimes a man who was battering his wife or girlfriend could get a job with a security company and be given a gun, and stand in front of a mall, and then take it home at night. So there were more guns in homes of women who had problems of domestic violence. Women realized that if they were to get into a fight and the man who lives with them has a gun, they were going to be more at risk; they're going to be more threatened and feel less secure. We kept reiterating that even though the security situation was something that was out of our control, we had something to say about it – because instead of feeling more secure, the 'security measures' were making us *less* secure, because there were more instances of women being killed and abused by men who were guarding malls or schools. We couldn't make a direct connection until we collected statistics, and we put them in a book and said, "This is how many women were killed and of all these women, this many were killed by security guards who had guns in their homes."

The report also talked about women not being a part of any decision-making processes, women's peace roles not being enforced by government-supported funding, and that women's roles as caretakers and caregivers expose them to more violence on the basis of gender and their weak economic situation. And the economic situation created by years of intense conflict made women's situations worse: more women were fired because there were fewer jobs, government cutbacks, etc., and women's rights were not supported. So imagine – you're traumatized, maybe you had been at the site of a violent explosion – and you don't have help and you can't get any help because the government has cut back on all the social services since it is using funds for what is considered 'national security.' Some of the recommendations we made were made were to address these kinds of issues.

At the same time, we worked together on another strategy, which was to change the law in Israel. We decided to work together with two women legislators to pass an amendment

to the current law for women's equality. This amended law stated that in conflict resolution or for peacekeeping or peace negotiations, women would have to be part of those teams. We wanted the law to establish a quota, saying that  $x$  number of women would be in any negotiating team that would be appointed by the government. As you know, negotiations do not only happen in formal public committees; there are also back channels, multiple tracks, multiple levels of negotiating teams. These teams don't only talk about security and peace, but they also discuss health, agriculture, water, social issues, transportation issues and more. On every one of these previous committees and teams, there were no women. Sarai Aharoni, who has been leading much of the 1325 work at Isha L'Isha for the past four years, is now doing her PhD thesis on 'where are all the women in the Oslo peace process?' and it turns out that the women are the ones who sit behind the scenes. They are in the offices and writing all of the contracts, they are the lawyers writing and preparing all of the papers that are then brought to the negotiating teams (which are a hundred percent men on both sides – Palestinian men and Israeli men). The men are sitting and doing the negotiations with contracts and papers that have been written by women – who are invisible.

So we decided it would be important to pass a law that would demand that women be part of negotiating teams; the law was to be an amendment to an existing law for 'Women's Equality in Israel.' Getting that amendment was one of the fastest/easiest activities that we undertook in the past four years! We found two partners in government – two women members of parliament who were also interested in passing a law. They worked with us, and the interesting thing was that not only did we demand that there be a quota of 25% women for all negotiating teams, we also wanted the law to specify that it must be women from different sectors of society. In other words, it wasn't enough to say 'women,' it had to say 'diverse women.' If we didn't say 'diverse women,' it wouldn't really reflect our feminist ideology, our desire for different women's voices to be heard. Jewish women and Palestinian women, Arab women, women who were from European, Eastern or Oriental backgrounds, women who came from the gay community, the straight community, etc. – we demanded that all these diverse women's voices be represented.

When we got to the last reading of the law, we realized two things: first we weren't going to have a quota. The government accepted that the law would state that women would be nominated to these committees, but left it open to themselves to determine how many women would be appointed "under the given circumstances." But they *did* agree to put in the word 'diverse.' We realized we weren't going to get a quota, which we accepted in order to get the bill passed, but we insisted that it be stated that there would be diverse women. So we worked for a year and we passed a law and had a sense of euphoria, but then we quickly realized that it was a false sense of euphoria and that we had reached the peak of implementing 1325. But we also knew that one other thing would never change: like 1325, there was no way to enforce this law.

So what do you do? You basically have to watch, look and listen, and find out who's sitting on what committees. If you find out that the committee has 100% representation of one gender, then you can go to the Supreme Court and demand for them to nominate women to be put on that committee. So you're continuing to work towards an implementation of 1325 on a non-stop basis; you're basically trying to keep the dam from

collapsing, and you're just standing there the whole time, to hold the water back. If a law is passed and there's no enforcement, it basically puts the onus on the women and the women's organizations to try and implement it; the men don't have any reason to try and change it, they don't think they have a need for any additional input.

After the law was passed, in the summer of 2005, we began to work on the third conference. And we started to work on preparing women for the negotiating teams. We passed a law and we knew that now people were going to say that there aren't any women on the committees because there weren't any women who are qualified. So we collected the names of women we felt were feminists and were aware of what 1325 represents. We called this collection of women's names *The Index*, and presented it in Jerusalem on July 12, 2006. We brought in a woman peacemaker from Sri Lanka, Visaka Dharmadasa. She spoke to about 150 women about her work in Sri Lanka to find a common dialogue with the archenemy of the state, the Tamil Tigers. She described actually going into their territory, meeting them face-to-face and talking to them about the fact that on both sides, women want a resolution. They began a dialogue, and it was very brave work that was done by her.

We prepared *The Index* and brought it with us to the Isha L'Isha's third conference. In the morning of July 12, 2006, we heard that Hezbollah had captured two soldiers on the Israeli-Lebanon border, so we went into this conference knowing that things had dramatically changed. We had originally planned to present *The Index* to Amir Peretz, the Minister of Defense of Israel. Three weeks prior to the conference, women within the organization were already very upset because of the severe bombardments and escalations in Gaza, and they felt that we could not have a presentation made to the Minister of Defense. The day the conference was held, he didn't show up; the Minister of Education, Yulie Tamir, came in his stead. We presented *The Index* to her and when she got on the stage to speak, she said that Israel was going to declare war, and many of the women in the room got up and just walked out. Many of them were leaders in the women's peace movement for decades, and women from many different organizations were also present that day. There was a deep sense that something happened that day that would not leave us unchanged.

The evening of the conference, we returned to our homes in the North, and basically everything stopped for us within hours in Haifa, because the Second Lebanon war hit us and bombs started falling, and there was no time for us to absorb what had happened that day. It took us months afterwards to finally come together again and to begin to talk about what had happened and what we would do to continue our work. The past two months have seen women in Isha L'Isha – both Palestinian women citizens of Israel and Jewish women – sitting together and saying that the work we have done to promote 1325 has been good in the sense that it has developed multiple strategies and affected many levels of the society. We have worked at the grassroots level – talking directly with women – we have organized conferences and seminars, and have had women talk about how they feel about the conflict. Yet at this point, we are going into a period of self-reflection. We have had three small internal seminars where we each talked about where we think this work is going.

Some of the reflections we have are that the work we do together as Jewish and Arab women isn't allowing us to continue to move in the direction of putting women in peace negotiating teams and to work with the government. Every time we go towards working with the government, we realize that we are falling into an area in which we seem to come out in a weakened position – every time. Our ideology, everything we feel, has to be negotiated or foregone in order to have any kind of political achievements. When we were putting out *The Index*, we thought that we could say, “These are the women who can sit and represent women’s needs.” But once we put *The Index* out, many of the women who were in the book said they didn’t want to sit on a negotiating team with men who belong to the government, the same men that made these and other wars. They said, “I really can’t sit with them and represent my views and my ideology and be part of their discourse. I have a different discourse and I need to do the work that I’m doing in my own arena.” And specifically, after *The Index* came out, many of the Palestinian women in Israel said, “I didn’t understand what this was and I really don’t see how I as a woman who was born in a Jewish state with my own culture and religion and my own national identity can sit on a negotiating team and represent the State of Israel and sit in a room where Palestinian women are on the other side of the table. I don’t belong to the side women who come from Palestine because I live as a citizen in a Jewish state, and they live as citizens in a Palestinian state. They see me as foreign, and I see the Israeli establishment as a foreign entity, so I can’t really sit anywhere at the negotiating table.”

So we are now having discussions on how we can continue to do this work because talking about 1325 as a resolution is a high and lofty ideal. But implementing it in a country where there are so many divisions and identities and ideologies, and where all of the power is sitting in the hands of a select group of men (even though our Minister of Foreign Affairs is a woman), that is a different story.

In this talk, I’ve tried to touch on some of our strategies and activities, and also to give a sketch of how 1325 is seen as a tool for change for us at Isha L’Isha: it’s a way for us to talk about gender, and to make women more aware of how their everyday lives are being affected by armed conflict, but in no way do we see it as our mission to implement 1325. For 1325 to be implemented, governments and the international community have to find resources to fund governments and NGOs to make it happen. The NGOs by themselves cannot do it, at least not in our area where there is an ongoing conflict. If we were post-conflict, and we were in a period of reconciliation and rebuilding, I think we could look at 1325 and say, “Okay, let’s see how we have all been affected.” But in a period of violent conflict where the military establishment has so much power and so many resources, a small number of women can only do as much as we can do.

**Carol Cohn:** Paula, thank you so much for a fascinating talk. Before we go on to the discussion, I just want to note that this talk has touched upon many different issues we have been addressing in the Consortium this year. One of the questions that we’re asking is: “How do women across borders work with each other?” A second is: “What happens when you take an international instrument and try and use it at a national or grassroots level?” That is, what happens when an international instrument whose fundamental aim is

to change the functioning of an international body is picked up by women in civil society for their own purposes? Can a Security Council resolution be an effective movement mobilizing tool, when that is not at all what it was designed for?

In that regard, your story of Isha L'Isha's work with 1325 is, on the one hand, tremendously inspiring, particularly in the many creative ways you found to use 1325: from raising consciousness amongst women of how war was affecting them; to using to it mainstream a gender perspective in (non-feminist) NGOs that are active in your communities; to going up to the next level of actually making a change in the government/legislature. Also, creating *The Index* is something that the international 1325 community has been planning to do for around six years, but never managed to accomplish. It's so impressive that you've done it – *and* that you show us the complexity and difficulty of putting such a list together.

Your story is about this incredibly creative grassroots use of 1325 at the national level, but the story also has intense echoes of some of the kinds of challenges faced by 1325 advocates who are working in the international arena. First, there is the problem that it is only a piece of paper, and unless you figure out how to get it enforced, it's meaningless. And then, if you struggle to enforce this document that has no enforcement mechanisms of its own, you end up pouring huge amounts of time and energy into it – when that may not ultimately be the best use of your time. It's almost as though you get sucked into the victory. Part of what's so impressive about Isha L'Isha is that (partly forced by fate) you are stopping to stand back and reconsider, and ask yourselves “is this our most important priority?”

A third question we have been addressing in Consortium discussion is “which women?” An issue that comes up again and again is that 1325 is not just about bringing in any women – you have to talk about *which* women? How do you ensure that they bring feminist perspectives, that they are committed to women's interests? How do you ensure that they represent diverse constituencies of women? And here again we see that you are way ahead – and yet there are these enormous problems when you actually carry it out. So I think your talk was simultaneously fascinating in the national/international parallels, inspiring in the creative ways that you have worked 1325, and also, in some ways, a bit discouraging.

### **Questions and Discussion**

**Q:** I was wondering if you could talk more about future plans of the organization, given that the conflict is going to continue for a while, and we know a lot of social issues get pushed aside in the face of armed conflict. Ideally, what would you like to see happen?

**PM:** You are right – just about every social issue gets pushed aside. For instance, the day that the summer war broke out, all the schools, daycares, and camps closed. If you were a man you'd still go to work, but if you were a woman with children, you couldn't. Everything was affected, and women are only beginning to realize how they were

affected, because we are still in a period of trauma. Everyone in the north, whether you are Jewish or Arab, village or town or city – everyone in Israel is still in post-trauma. We were under live attack for 34 days, and I have to tell you that nowhere during those 34 days did the government come out and say we were at war. They refused to declare it as a war; if they did, they had to give different kinds of compensations and funnel funds to local municipalities. They weren't ready to call it a war, so it was called an "operation." People are still recovering, and now there's another war in the south and we are under attack again, and we're being told on TV every day that within the next year we will be under a major attack by all of the surrounding countries. Every day we are told that Syria is going to attack us, and that Iran is just waiting to attack us, so the issue of security is basically the only issue on the agenda today – nothing else enters the media. For us to talk about 1325 right now ... it isn't really the right time. You can't say to people, "Do you know women are being discriminated against and marginalized during times of war because there aren't enough resources?" You can't talk about issues of women and gender now; they're off the table when there's a war or a threat of war.

If there is a plus, it is that our total frustration happened several months before we put out *The Index*. Before we had the third conference, we already had this incredible debate; there were radical feminists who wanted to discuss the gender impact of security situations, and who no longer are willing to accept the separation of "national security" and "personal security." We want personal security to be understood as part of national security. We want to know that if I don't feel safe in my home or on the street, it's as important to me as a woman as feeling safe within the borders of the country; we want those issues have equal bearing. This is basically the radical feminist perspective. We're not going to change the way they think, but we're going to talk in different terms and change the discourse. We're going to talk about women's rights for personal security within the context of national security issues.

Then there are what I would call the "white collar feminists" – the women who look to the government and see the tools of law and the courts as being able to change society. They are saying, "Let's go ahead and implement 1325." There's a small group of women now in Israel that have come to us and said, "We're going to appeal to the Supreme Court and demand that women be put on this negotiating team, because we know that this team has been nominated and there are no women on the team." They came to the women of Isha L'Isha and asked us to go along with the appeal. I have very few doubts that we will not go ahead with it, and the reason is that we feel so impacted by the work that we've done so far; you can only put out so much in a certain direction before you begin to feel that you're not producing the results that you want. The work that has to be done, but the resources that have to go into getting just one woman put onto a 20 person negotiating team is so huge, and the final impact is not going to be what we know it needs to be. We need a critical mass in order for women or any marginalized group to have an impact. For us to get five women on a negotiating team is an impossibility.

So, I think that what will happen is we will work less towards the implementation of 1325, and more on grassroots awareness. Maybe because of the war and because of people feeling insecure, it might hit a note. The average woman living in various parts of

the country will now understand that there is no difference between personal security and national security. There's just 'security'; either you feel safe or don't. If you don't feel safe at all, then you have the right to demand that something be done, and that something is negotiations. Another war won't make you feel safe.

Another thing that will impact what we do in the future is dictated by the people who fund us. The various organizations are all marvelous, but most of the time they tell you, "We will fund a publication/conference/something that we can see, happens once, and then it's over." So if you're dependent on grants, you end up doing some things you don't really want to do, because the funding world wants you to.

Two of our women, who coordinated the project, both just came back from Sweden where they had a very good series of meetings with Swedish women who are working on 1325 from a completely different perspective than we are. Many Europeans are working to implement it in their peacekeeping forces because their militaries have roles in the international arena and they want them to be more sensitive to women's needs. They initiated meetings between women from Isha L'Isha and women from Palestine from women's NGOs. The connections between Palestinian women and Israeli women are very difficult because there's little place for discussion; the issue of the occupation is the major overriding issue for women from Palestine and their ability to discuss or coordinate efforts with Israeli partners is minimal. If the funders would give us money to do more grassroots work and education and organization, then that's probably what we would do.

**Q:** I'm curious about the support you're received from various internationally known organizations. Has your 1325 work gotten support from these bodies?

**PM:** We mostly get funds from Israeli-based and American-based organizations, and also from the Canadian government for a course on conflict and negotiating skills that we did with Jewish and Arab women. We don't generally get funds from Europe because Israel is an advanced country economically, and Europe tends not to fund countries with a high per capita income. Also, most 1325 funding has been from feminist funders or groups involved in the region.

**Q:** How large is your organization?

**PM:** It's not large, but the women are incredibly dedicated. It's a non-hierarchical organization; it's one of the only ones in Israel like this. Since its establishment in 1983, there has never been a director or a single person with greater power, control or influence than anyone else. Usually, there are about six staff women. With only one staff woman on this project, Amani Dayif, she only works half-time (20 hours a week), and has a volunteer steering committee of at least 10- 15 women, who all volunteer their time.

Isha L'Isha has a newsletter sent to 3,000 women; of those women, I would say 100 come to meetings and are involved. At an average monthly meeting, there are 20 to 30 women but at an annual event we would get about 70 or 80 women. It tends to be about 80-90%

Jewish women and about 10-15% Arab women. We're sensitive to fact that Arab women are the minority, and we'd like to have more Arab women involved.

**Q:** Do you find a lot of resistance from other women in Israel?

**PM:** We are viewed as being very radical and extreme, although I must say that there are many different personal expressions among our women. Some feel comfortable protesting publicly on the streets against the occupation, but we don't all always share the same political views. We do have the same feminist/gender perspective. We can have separate variations of political affiliation but maintain one feminist view and agree on how women are affected. We've managed to keep an organization running that is less of an organization and more like an extended family. Everyone is interconnected, and we all work together. We all interact with each other and try not to use or abuse informal power. We try to have a space where all women involved feel they can participate and be heard. We don't allow people who are racist or prejudiced or offensive.

The staff includes a woman campaigning against trafficking in the sex industry, a woman on implementing 1325, a woman on economic advancement, a fundraiser, a lawyer, and a general coordinator. We publish a Hebrew-Arabic newsletter every two months, we have collective meetings every month, and now we have put out special materials concerning the recent war and women's rights.

**Q:** It sounds like your focus was mostly about the peace *talks* when they were going on, but what about the broader concept of the peace *process*. Do you focus on whether there's going to be negotiating teams and who is responsible in the creation of these teams?

**PM:** Well that's one of the roles of the court appeal that they're doing now – there must be women in the teams. We don't always know what teams have been picked and when. These things happen quietly and behind the scenes – there are always negotiations going on, even when they don't tell you they are going on. There are back channels and you aren't privy to the information. When teams are formally appointed it's already too late, so the whole point was to pass a law to appoint women from the start.

**Q:** Could you speak more about the stalled peace talks and your role?

**PM:** There are women's peace organizations like Bat Shalom and the Women's Coalition for a Just Peace that will go out and demonstrate at all times, calling for peace and negotiations, and so forth. In contrast, Isha L'Isha is *not* an organization I see as ever taking peace as part of its core mission. One of the reasons is that we're the only radical feminist organization that works across national lines, with Jewish and Arab women working together in one organization. We said that we each hold our own political beliefs. We focus together on bringing a gender perspective to society. We're the ones who are going to reveal and uncover the roles that are being played by the power that's held in certain hands, and not being shared equally. Women are 52% of the society, about 80% of the society over the age of 75%. So Isha L'Isha doesn't go into the peace

issue, because if we do, then nobody else will be doing the work that we now do. So we are not going to go out and demand peace negotiations. Though many of the women do wear different hats; each organization has its own track, and so the 1325 track was an easy track for us to take as long as we stay on the issue of bringing women's names, talking about engendering, training women for negotiating teams, etc., but not demanding anything in terms of peace.

1325 isn't only about peace. It is saying, "If there is an area of conflict or post-conflict, women should be part of negotiations and part of rebuilding of the country." There's a gender perspective to life in an area where conflict is on-going, and there's the issue of the UN and the peacekeeping forces – which is wherever there are peacekeeping forces – and women's needs and issues need to be addressed. We are comfortable in staying in the area of women's unique needs, which are basically grassroots issues, and we are comfortable saying women should be part of negotiations post-war as well.

**Q:** I'm wondering if your group is working on ways to reframe the cultural elements of the society so that they're not so patriarchy-based, so that men will feel more comfortable including women and still be able to remain true to their cultural roots.

**PM:** In the Middle East we have a difficult problem, because wherever you have an on-going military conflict, additional power and roles are given to men. They act – as the protectors, the heroes, leaders and warriors. In societies where there is militarism, it's even more difficult to reframe society to fully involve women. We felt we were moving ahead and we were producing this great network of connections between organizations and grassroots groups, and we were moving to really make it visible that women were full members of society, but then the Lebanon War fell on our heads, and there were suddenly no women in the media and on TV. They did hold several public media discussions on women and how women were impacted, which was unusual. But what does happen in patriarchal societies is that you can try and find partners among men, but it still doesn't change it ... so we're constantly looking for different strategies. In the United States, you find that women have risen to great levels of careers, and after 10-15 years these same women retire to start their own businesses because they don't want to be the token women sitting in companies with a very male power-oriented environment. These women would rather be in their own environments that are less hierarchical and feel more comfortable. Right now, there is a small movement of men and women working together for taking a feminist agenda and trying to move it ahead.

**Q:** I'm surprised at women participating in the military, but never being granted a very high position in society.

**PM:** You can look at the division of labor within the military. Women will be in human resources, spokeswomen, but not in artillery, navy, etc. But yes, women serve in the army; my daughter's in the army, and all Israelis who are Jewish have mandatory army service unless you choose to take the difficult and uncommon route of refusing to serve.

**Q:** You've made it clear that there's a lot of resistance from the military establishment and political establishment, but what about resistance to feminism from the orthodox groups or other groups?

**PM:** There are a lot of feminists. There are feminists from almost every single community, and each community has a group of strong vocal feminist women and it's amazing to see how they are growing. They have individual issues and they also know within their cultures what they can do and what they can't do.

**Q:** I'm from Nepal. You mentioned some interaction with Sweden and all that you have achieved. Have you looked into collaborating with other organizations across the world?

**PM:** Look at the report that was put out in 2004 by a group of funders on [peacewomen.org](http://peacewomen.org) under "Resources" called "Four Years After." We wrote and applied to the organization, and we're very proactive about putting what we've done into documents so that others can see what we're doing. The fact that we were invited to Israel is positive. I got an email from the sister city of Haifa, from a woman who works with the head of the local women's commission; we'll talk about 1325 together. I don't think the issue is for women to talk with other women's groups, but rather the issue is that there needs to be broad dialogue on the international level.

### **Biography**

**Paula Mills** has been active in feminist organizations in Northern Israel since 1993, working with a unique network of feminist groups. As fundraiser for Isha L'Isha-Haifa Feminist Center and later as Coordinator for the Haifa Women's Coalition, she oversaw the growth of four organizations: Isha L'Isha, the Haifa Rape Crisis Center, the Haifa Battered Women's Hotline, and Kayan-Feminist Organization. In 1999, she helped co-found Economic Empowerment for Women – the first non-profit in Israel for women's micro-enterprise – providing Jewish and Arab women with skills, training and micro-loans for setting up small businesses. From 2002-2006 she fundraised with Kayan-Feminist Organization for Arab Women. In March 2005, she translated the Isha L'Isha Shadow Report on 1325 in Israel, presented to the UN Beijing+10 CSW meetings.