

Civil service formally bans gender segregation

Commission instructs all ministries and government agencies to treat all employees equally, as well as members of the public, regardless of their gender.

By Ophir Bar-Zohar

The Civil Service Commission on Wednesday banned gender segregation at all government agencies and official events, as Israel ramps up its efforts to battle the separation of the sexes by some parts of the religious community.

The commission instructs all ministries and government agencies to treat all employees equally, as well as members of the public, regardless of their gender. The commission warned that it would take measures against anyone who breaks the rules.

The order was presented at a meeting of the interministerial team charged with fighting discrimination against women, headed by ministers Limor Livnat and Daniel Hershkowitz.

Tanya Rosenblit, the Ashdod resident who refused to move to the back of the bus when told to do so by an ultra-Orthodox male passenger last month, said at the meeting she had received several death threats.

Rosenblit, hailed as the "Israeli Rosa Parks," filed a complaint to the Yarkon District police after she had received threats by phone, e-mail and Facebook.

Rosenblit made headlines after refusing to let an ultra-Orthodox man dictate where she could sit on a public bus traveling from Ashdod to Jerusalem.

A Transportation Ministry official said at the meeting the ministry had opened a free, 24/7 hotline for complaints about discrimination against women on public transportation: 1-800-800-355.

Some people attending the meeting said women's segregation on buses also involves economic discrimination, because traveling on segregated bus lines is much cheaper than traveling on regular lines.

Eli Glicksman and Rami Babian, who have filed a class action suit on the matter, said a trip from Haifa to Jerusalem on the segregated bus line costs NIS 26, compared with NIS 42 on regular lines.

But passengers inquiring how to go from Haifa to Jerusalem are referred by the information center to the regular, more expensive lines, and not told about the cheaper ones, they said.

Also on Wednesday, the Religious Services Ministry reneged on its decision to amend the agreements with Israel's burial society requiring it to allow women to make eulogies at funerals. Instead, the ministry will send instructions to burial society branches throughout the country, a ministry official said at the meeting.

Ministry director general Avigdor Ohana said forbidding women to eulogize and segregating them at funerals was not as prevalent as previously claimed.

"We will circulate an announcement saying nobody can tell a woman she may not eulogize. Every family will do as it wishes," he said.

According to Livnat, "I've received several dozen complaints indicating that this practice is implemented in many cemeteries."