

Reform rabbis support women at the Wall

Nicole Neroulias Religion News Service | Jan. 5, 2010

Reform rabbis have resolved to protest attacks on religious freedom in 2010 by supporting women who seek to worship equally with men in Jerusalem and Muslims who want to build minarets in Switzerland.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, representing about 1,800 Reform Jewish clergy in North America, issued a statement Dec. 30 against the treatment of Israeli feminist Nofrat Frankel, who was arrested in November after violating a law against women wearing traditional male prayer shawls and reading the Torah at the Western Wall.

Frankel, a medical student, and other "Women of the Wall" activists argue the holy site should not be operated like an Orthodox synagogue -- with strict gender segregation and restrictions on how women may pray -- because it belongs to all Jews.

On Jan. 10, Women of the Wall supporters plan to hold a 10 a.m. service in San Francisco's Union Square and other cities. Female worshippers may wear male vestments to demonstrate how some modern women prefer to pray. A similar day of solidarity was organized last month by the Women's Rabbinic Network, a partner of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

In its parallel condemnation of the recent Swiss vote to ban new minarets, the rabbis noted that European Jews once endured similar discrimination during the Holocaust.

"We have been shocked by attacks on religious liberty in both Switzerland and our own Jewish State of Israel," the group's statement reads. "As we approach the secular new year, we hope that 2010 will see no further erosions of religious freedom but will be a year of liberty for men and women of all religions everywhere."

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