

SUGGESTED READING FROM NCJW FOR INTERNATIONAL AGUNOT DAY (FAST OF ESTHER) — MARCH 13, 2014

Thousands of Jewish women all over the world are still denied the basic right of divorce by a system of Jewish law that allows only a husband to initiate divorce proceedings. In Israel, because religion and state are not separated, only the *halachic option*, one in accordance with Jewish religious law, is available to couples seeking marriage or divorce. Moreover, any woman who desires a Jewish divorce, a *get*, and is denied one by her husband is relegated to the status of *agunah* — one chained to a marriage — and lacks any civil legal recourse.

The National Council of Jewish Women sees the withholding of a Jewish divorce as a serious violation of a woman's freedom. The inability to liberate oneself legally from a marriage is an affront to individual rights and freedom. The right to divorce as well as the right to marry should be a choice made by equal partners. On the Eve of Purim, when we celebrate Queen Esther and her courageous and powerful actions on behalf of her Jewish community, we urge all community leaders to take action and speak out against this violation of human rights. We, as Queen Esther did so long ago, seek the right of all Jews to live free of oppression.

We raise our voices
In the name of our sisters, the Agunot
Who suffer in chains
Which bind them to unwanted marriages

We raise our voices
In the name of our sisters, the Agunot
With compassion and love
When love and compassion had fled their homes

We raise our voices
In the name of our sisters, the Agunot
When we call on the judges of Israel
To rule against oppression

We raise our voices
In the name of our sisters, the Agunot
When we call upon the Rabbis
To use their power for good alone

We raise our voices
In the name of our sisters, the Agunot
To call for freedom from tyranny
In the spirit of our tradition's respect for human rights

We call for action
In the name of our sisters, the Agunot
To profess NCJW's tradition of Jewish values
Through education, advocacy, and the pursuit of equality, justice and tikkun olam