

IRAC (Israel Religious Action Center) is a non-profit organization that advocates for the rights of all Jews in Israel, including Reform and Conservative Jews. IRAC is currently litigating the case of Rabbi Miri Gold, a Reform rabbi who is not recognized by the State of Israel for her services. IRAC is seeking equal government funding for liberal rabbis.

Seeking Equal Government Funding for Liberal Rabbis

The Case of Rabbi Miri Gold

Facts of the Case:

Rabbi Miri Gold has served as the Rabbi of Birkat Shalom congregation in Kibbutz Gezer since her ordination as a Reform Rabbi by the Hebrew Union College in 1999. Sixteen other local rabbis serve the area of the Gezer regional council and receive a State salary. Rabbi Miri Gold, who serves the entire region and is supported by the Municipality of Gezer, is not recognized by the State because she is a Reform rabbi.

The Issue:

Orthodox Religious services in Israel are supplied and funded by the State. The State employs hundreds of Rabbis in posts around the country – all of them Orthodox men. The State also funds heavily religious services given by private organizations. 99% of this goes to Orthodox organizations. While the government financially supports Jewish institutions in Israel, it does not recognize all streams of Judaism. As a result, only Orthodox Judaism receives government allocations for its buildings, rabbis, and educational programming. This leads to the unequal treatment of non-Orthodox Judaism. And so, Reform Jews, and other liberal Jews in Israel, end up paying twice: they fund through their taxes the Orthodox religious services given by the State. They also pay their dues to their own non-Orthodox congregation, which doesn't receive any public support. IRAC challenges this policy by requiring the State to fund all streams of Judaism equally, including paying the accepted government salary for Reform/Conservative Rabbi who are Municipal Rabbis.

Case Updates:

IRAC filed a petition in 2005 demanding that the State funds the salary of Rabbi Miri Gold. After a two-year deferral by the Supreme Court, the State has finally recognized the need for budgeting non-Orthodox services although they have not allocated the funds or even determined from which budget these funds will come. The hearing on June 17, 2009 resulted in a four-month extension in order for intensive negotiations to take place between IRAC and State attorneys. In the past week, almost two months after the hearing, we were informed who will be the government contact person to negotiate with, so these talks will hopefully start soon.