

# Democracy in Israel

Since Israel's establishment in 1948 the country was and still remains a vibrant democracy in the Middle East, a region where democracy has not historically flourished. Like every U.S. citizen, Israel's citizens enjoy the right to vote, freedom of the press and religious freedom.

## Excerpts from the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel

“The State of Israel will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations...”

“... We appeal – in this very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months – to the Arab inhabitants of the State to return to the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, with full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions”.

## Minority Communities

- 21.5 percent of Israel's population is non-Jews.
  - 930,000 Muslim Arabs – most of whom are Sunni
  - 109,000 Christian Arabs
  - 170,000 Bedouins – most of whom are Muslim.
  - 101,000 Druze. The Druze maintain a separate cultural, social and religious community.
  - 3,000 Circassians – most of who are Sunni Muslims. The Circassians maintain a distinct ethnic identity; yet participate in Israel's economic and national affairs without assimilating either into Jewish society or into the general Muslim communities.
- Arabic is Israel's second official language

## Women in Israel

- In the year 2000, women comprised 53.4% of the total civilian labor force
- In the 1999-2000 academic year, women received 58.6% of all university degrees
- From 1998-2000, 56.9% of all students in university were women
- In the 1998-1999 academic year, 69.7% of all candidates for PhDs and MDs in the medical field were women
- The life expectancy for women in Israel is 83.2 years compared to 80.9 years for women in the United States

## Religious Freedom

- Israel does not have an official religion. Jewish holidays are government holidays, (similar to Christmas in the U.S.)
- Each religious community is free by law to administer its own family law and internal affairs. Each has its own religious council and courts, recognized by law and with jurisdiction over all religious affairs and matters of personal status.
- The Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for supporting the religious needs of all communities in Israel, including the Muslim, Druze, Christian and Jewish communities.

## Knesset

- The Knesset is the unicameral (single chamber) parliament of Israel. The current, Eighteenth Knesset has 120 members. Fourteen of those members are members of minority groups:
  - Arabs – 10
  - Druze – 4
- There are 24 women members of the Knesset.

