

CASE STUDY 6

Gila Svirsky

Nonviolent resister

In 1988, as the First Intifada (the Palestinian uprising) unfolded, Gila Svirsky was one of the first Women in Black, a group formed to protest the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Gila was born in the USA in 1946. Her Orthodox Jewish parents had fled racism in Europe in the 1920s. She moved to Israel in the 1980s, where she worked for coexistence with Palestinians as Israel's military increased its operations in the occupied territories.

“Life in the territories became even more unbearable... [The intifada] was clearly a popular uprising in which children and women were full participants.”

Gila Svirsky

Amid this turbulence, Israeli activists in Jerusalem began holding vigils. Women wore a striking black “like a Greek chorus”, and the look stuck. The demonstrations became regular.

“As an Israeli, I also fear the violence of Palestinian extremists. We have all narrowly escaped terrible incidents, and some of our loved ones did not manage to escape. But that makes me even more determined to forge a peace that will be acceptable to both sides.”

Gila continues to live in Israel and take action for peace.

Read more about Gila: www.gilasvirsky.com

FROM EAPPI
REPORTS



Women in Black

“Keeping alive the possibility of dissent, every Friday, Women in Black hold a silent vigil on a roundabout at the junction of five roads in West Jerusalem. They wear black clothing in mourning for all victims of the conflict, hence the name. They hold placards in the shape of a hand, with a message saying ‘Stop the Occupation’ variously in English, Hebrew and Arabic. Women in Black was formed by Israeli women in Jerusalem in 1988 following the outbreak of the First Intifada. They were responding to violations of human rights perpetrated by Israeli settlers and soldiers in occupied Palestine. By now it is a worldwide movement. Last Friday we stood alongside them from noon until 1pm, as ecumenical accompaniers do each week.



At the Women in Black weekly demonstration in West Jerusalem.
Photo: EAPPI/Kate

The reaction these women face is startling. Cars honk and drivers make obscene hand gestures and shout insults. There is always a counter-demonstration on the opposite pavement with people waving Israeli flags and singing nationalist songs. Sometimes people come up and shout in our faces. Sometimes they spit. The women remain still and silent.”



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