

Feminism takes back seat to survival in Israel



TAMAR ELДАР-AVIDAR

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— Tamar Eldar-Avidar

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Though Tamar Eldar-Avidar's job concerns the status of women, as an Israeli she knows that feminism has to stay on the back burner for now.

"The number one priority of Israelis is survival," she said.

"We have to be concerned next with security and the building of the country. Only after that is the status of women concerned."

A native Israeli who was born in Haifa, Mrs. Eldar-Avidar is the attache for women's affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

She was in the area to speak with students and women's groups.

"Until two months ago, I was the only woman at the embassy here," she said. "Actually 40 percent of embassy employees are women, but only 7 percent are in top jobs."

"Only three Israeli women have been ambassadors. First was Golda Meir who was ambassador to Russia, then an ambassador to Denmark, and now we have one in Norway."

"The obstacle to a woman becoming an ambassador is once you are married it's hard to schlep your husband and family around."

Mrs. Eldar-Avidar has solved that problem in her own family.

"My husband calls himself liberated," she said. "His passport says 'husband of Tamar.'"

THE COUPLE have three sons, Shimon, 27, Alon, 21 (just released from the army) and Ari, 11.

"Besides being a diplomat, I'm a very proud Jewish mother," she said.

And besides that, she is a well-known journalist in Israel, currently on leave from her newspaper Maariv.

Mrs. Eldar-Avidar was graduated from the Reali High School in Haifa and the Teacher's Training Seminary.

Two years of teaching found her bored, so she wrote an article and forwarded it to a leading Israeli magazine. They immediately hired her and her journalism career began.

By that time, she had already done her mandatory military service as a member of the Palmach, Israel's commando forces.

"And we were right on the front lines in the War for Independence," she said.

Mrs. Eldar-Avidar has written seven best-selling books which are compilations of her columns on daily life in Israel.

Her job at the embassy is to disseminate information about Israel and tell about the status of women.

"In Israel, the status of women is complicated," she said. "People in this country expect us to be completely liberated and equal, but it's not true and mostly because of religious aspects."

"The obstacle to a woman becoming an ambassador is once you are married it's hard to schlep your husband and family around."

"TODAY, 50 percent of the population is from Moslem countries where the status of women is secondary," she said.

"We have certain groups to whom women's lib sounds very strange. We do have a feminist movement, but it's a weak one."

Mrs. Eldar-Avidar hopes that when Israel solves her most critical problems, there will be more concentration on the problems and status of women.

During the premiership of Yitzhak Rabin, a committee for the status of women was appointed, she pointed out.

"But always, there were other matters that came first," she said.

The Israeli feminist movement was founded by an American woman, Marsha Friedman. When she first began to speak out, Mrs. Eldar-Avidar said, "She sounded out of place."

"But we have realized since that we have work to do."

In Israel, the equivalent of the Equal Rights Amendment was passed in 1951, but Mrs. Eldar-Avidar said, "If you don't have to struggle for it, you take it for granted."

Israel's top problem today is the economy with its unbelievable inflation rate of 112 percent.

"STOP A MAN in the street and ask what worries him most, and he'll say the economy, not autonomy for the West Bank," she said.

Mrs. Eldar-Avidar contends that the main reason for Israel's economic problems is the stiff price the tiny nation paid for peace.

"We gave up the Sinai oil fields expecting to be able to continue buying oil from Iran," she said. "Comparing oil prices, we pay the equivalent of more than \$6 a gallon for gasoline in Israel today."

Although it's tough to make it in an economy of extreme inflation, Mrs. Eldar-Avidar said she remembers how much worse it has been in the past.

"We used to dream of having a whole chicken," she said. And she recalled her parents giving up their allotted one egg a week for their children.

Currently, Mrs. Eldar-Avidar is preparing for the forthcoming International Congress on Women to take place in Copenhagen.

"WE ALREADY know that Israel will be singled out and criticized for the Palestinian situation," she said. "My main job now is to lobby concerning that situation."

"We must convince other delegations not to vote for the Plan of Action if it includes the Palestinian issue."

Although, she will not represent her country at that congress since her tour of duty will be over in two months, Mrs. Eldar-Avidar knows those who do will have a tough road to travel.

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