

Barbra Streisand Raps Orthodox Jews' Actions Against Israeli Women

U.S. entertainer Barbra Streisand on Monday took a swipe at Orthodox Jews in Israel who compel women to sit in the back of buses and assault them for following religious rituals traditionally reserved for men.

"It's distressing to read about women in Israel being forced to sit in the back of a bus or ... having metal chairs hurled at them when they intend to peacefully and legally pray. Or women being banned from singing in public ceremonies," she said.

The Oscar and Emmy-winning actress and singer, who is Jewish, was speaking at a ceremony at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where she was awarded an honorary doctorate.

A public bus system operating in some Israeli cities forces gender segregation in deference to ultra-Orthodox rabbis who have long wielded political power in the Jewish state.

Some of these clerics are also battling against a women's prayer group seeking to liberalize worship at the Western Wall, one of Judaism's holiest sites. The women wear prayer shawls and read aloud from the Jewish scriptures there, defying a tradition that only men should do so.

Streisand starred in a 1983 film *Yentl*, which explores the yearning of Jewish women for religious equality with men.

The Brooklyn-born Streisand, 71, also offered some criticism of her own country's failure to achieve full gender equality.

"I know that solutions don't come easy, and they don't in the United States, where women are still making 80 cents for every dollar that a man makes," she said.

During her visit to Israel, Streisand will also sing at a 90th birthday celebration for President Shimon Peres and will perform at two concerts in Tel Aviv.

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