

## Rights of Individuals - 1975

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### Modern Technology and Secret Surveillance

Recent events in the political and economic lives of United States citizens have revealed an alarming threat to our human and constitutional rights. As a consequence of this threat, there is an erosion of trust in some of the federal agencies whose uncontrolled excesses have now come to light. Modern technology has made it possible to maintain secret surveillance, to collect personal data illegally and to store such data in files which are in the hands of police and intelligence agencies at various levels of government. Such activities, if not vigorously supervised and controlled, destroy those very liberties which guarantee and are in turn guaranteed by true democracy.

Therefore, The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in convention assembled in Dallas, Texas in November, 1975, on behalf of its United States members, supports congressional action: to halt immediately all illegal government surveillance and collection of data; to destroy existing dossiers, files and banks of information obtained by these means; and to maintain supervision over government agencies so that they function within the law and the Constitution. Further, through its affiliates, NFTS supports the dissemination of information about the rights of people under the Freedom of Information Act, so that by individual action false, misleading or illegally obtained information may be expunged from all records. Of equal importance is the fact that individuals have the right to have access to their credit records, and to correct or erase information which could effectively bar them from full participation in our economic system.

### Equal Administration of Justice

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods supports legislative and administrative reforms which provide legal and financial assistance to those who would otherwise be deprived of adequate representation in the courts. In accordance with our tradition which says, "You shall not judge unfairly; you shall show no partiality... justice, justice, shall you pursue" (Deut. 16:19-20), we call upon the respective governments of our members to provide for all people equal administration of justice without consideration of wealth, race or positions of power.

### The Crime of Rape and Its Victims

Because the crime of rape has frequently left its victims subject to further trauma inflicted by police, courts and publicity, it is a crime which is often not reported by the victim, with the result that the perpetrator is neither subject to punishment by law nor treated for deviant behavior. NFTS supports efforts to establish "Rape Centers" and we encourage the cooperation of Sisterhoods and their members with volunteer and governmental agencies in furthering such centers where the victim may be helped to recovery and legal steps may be taken to bring the rapist to justice.

### The Juvenile Offender

Our concern for justice and individual rights cannot overlook the juvenile offender. We particularly note that in secure detention facilities, pending court hearings, are large numbers of juveniles, more than a third of whom are "status offenders." Status offenses are acts such as truancy, curfew violation, disobeying parental authority—none of which would be considered crimes if committed by adults. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods urges the removal of status offenses from the category of criminal acts, and the effective implementation of alternative community agency action to assist troubled youth.

We further advocate the establishment of separate detention centers for those juveniles who must be held—

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centers which are removed from adult criminal prisons where juveniles are very often physically and psychologically abused, making less likely their return to an open society as productive, law-abiding persons.

Since we believe that juvenile justice need not always be punitive, we urge our governments—national, state and local—to appropriate sufficient funds for community agencies to provide, when suitable, non-criminal resources for juveniles, and to offer to our troubled young people alternatives to destructive life styles.

Regrettably serious crimes of great violence are increasingly being perpetrated in some areas by the very young. Careful studies which include evaluations of background and other factors need to be undertaken by both private and governmental agencies in order to address properly this area of specialized gravity. All persons of good will should be concerned with study and action to overcome maladjustments. But in all circumstances, the youthful offender, no less than the adult offender or victim, needs full protection of his civil rights.

#### Legal Abortion

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods affirms our previously adopted strong support for the right of a woman to obtain a legal abortion, under conditions now outlined in the 1973 decision of the United States Supreme Court. The Court's position established that during the first two trimesters the private and personal decision of whether or not to continue to term an unwanted pregnancy should remain a matter of choice for the woman; she alone can exercise her ethical and religious judgment in this decision. Only by vigorously supporting this individual right to choose can we also ensure that every woman may act according to the religious and ethical tenets to which she adheres.

We oppose laws which would remove abortion from the category of medical assistance, as well as any discriminatory laws which would effectively prevent women from making the choice which is their right, by denying them access to proper medical care.

NFTS reaffirms our commitment to taharat hamishpachah—the purity of the family—and supports the dissemination of birth control information as well as other education for family planning as a contribution to responsible family life. Such education and parallel efforts to eradicate ignorance and poverty would substantially reduce the need to make the choice for abortion.

#### Health Insurance

Judaism teaches us that where there is a way to alleviate suffering, not to do so is to deny our responsibility to humankind. The question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" has always been answered affirmatively by Jewish tradition. In modern society, which places a very high value on good health as a necessity for full participation in the benefits of our secular culture, the financial costs of medical care have risen to a level which effectively bars large numbers of people from relief of suffering. With this in mind, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods supports the proposal that:

- 1) In the United States there should be made available through the government a comprehensive single benefit health insurance to cover all aspects of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation in all fields of medical practice.
- 2) This insurance should be made available to all on a cost-sharing basis, according to their ability to pay.
- 3) Standards of health care service as well as standards of licensure and professional competence should be continually reviewed by a board on which consumers are represented, but specifically excluding lay participation on boards of licensure.
- 4) Both private and government efforts should be made to enlarge the supply of health personnel and to make more effective use of all professional resources.
- 5) The rights of persons to choose among doctors should be assured. Equally, the rights of doctors to practice according to their judgment must be assured, provided they meet appropriate standards of competence and responsibility.

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods is aware of the enormous costs of such a program, but we hold that in addition to the humanitarian benefits to those who are presently denied full access to health care, the ripple effect of better medical care would ultimately benefit every citizen socially and economically.

#### Special Note

While NFTS appreciates that material in this and other Resolutions may seem particularly pertinent to United States members, we urge associated Sisterhoods and members in the fourteen other countries of the worldwide circle of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods to translate the underlying warnings and meanings of these statements—where this has not yet been done—into terms applicable in their nations and societies. Thus shall each of us be a guardian of the rights of every individual and a builder of a better society for all humanity.