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RESISTING NETANYAHU'S CURBS Diaspora Jews 'have a voice'

PETER KOHN

LESLEY Sachs, vice-chair of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), said Jews worldwide can help shape the kind of Israel the next generation will know.

During her upcoming visit for the UIA Progressive Appeal, the South African-born former Women of the Wall activist, arrested five times for protesting women's rights at the Kotel, will address Progressive Jewish fundraisers.

Sachs will urge Jews to dig deeper, now Israel's Progressive community stands to lose an estimated \$A1.3 million a year under drastic government changes.

Israel's Supreme Court has ruled for state funding of non-Orthodox synagogues and schools and state salaries for non-Orthodox rabbis. It has approved non-Orthodox conversions outside Israel for residency status. Women are no longer prevented from reciting a graveside kaddish or relegated to the back of government-run buses in Charedi neighbourhoods.

But Sachs said a Knesset veto over selection and dismissal of judges and an override of judgments would undo a lot, and smacks of Hungarian PM Viktor Orban's war on his country's courts.

"Hungary is happening in Israel," she charged. Benjamin Netanyahu "is standing trial and he is going to do everything to make



Lesley Sachs (right) blows a shofar at the Western Wall.

sure he doesn't go to prison".

The judicial changes would suit Israel's Chief Rabbinate, she said. The Progressive movement it shuns has 54 communities, 30 kindergartens, four schools and hundreds of conversions a year.

Former extremist Itamar Ben Gvir is Security Minister, and Bezalel Smotrich, Finance Minister, "is diverting millions to Charedim", she said. Noam MK Avi Maoz talked about the "darkness" of liberal Judaism.

Sachs said the Law of Return will be changed to exclude Jews with only a Jewish grandfather, denying many families aliyah.

Under National Missions Minister Orit Strock of Smotrich's Religious Zionism party, who heads a Jewish Identity Directorate, anti-discrimination laws in public

spaces will be weakened.

Coalition partner Shas wants six months' jail for women donning a tallit at the Kotel. Women of the Wall "will not give up our right to wrap ourselves in a tallit and read Torah", declared Sachs.

But a growing anti-government backlash is mainstreaming. "Even in Efrat [a religious community], they're demonstrating."

The IMPJ is at the vanguard of resisting curbs on freedoms, she said. "Before every Saturday night protest, we make havdalah. We're bringing a Jewish dimension. We're saying what the government is doing, that's not Judaism. In the name of Judaism, we'll protect Israeli democracy.

"It's the duty of every Jew in the world to fight for the Israel they'd want to live in."



UPJ

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