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## Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility's Finance Director Shamilov resigns

**Alleged "anti-Israel" stance denied by faith investment group**

by [Vibeka Mair](#) | May 17th, 2017

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Gail Shamilov, Director of Finance at the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, the US-based faith investment body which represents \$100bn of assets, has resigned over what she describes as "a pronounced anti-Israel stance" since the arrival of its new CEO Josh Zinner – a charge the ICCR denies.

Shamilov had been with the ICCR for six years, and has also held finance roles at TIAA-CREF and New York City's Central Synagogue. She told Responsible Investor that she resigned late last month after what she said was a change to the organisation's policy on the Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS) Israel campaign.

However, in a letter this week to its members, the ICCR says the BDS campaign is not, and has never been, included in ICCR's advocacy platform.

BDS is a coalition of Palestinian civil society organisations advocating divestment campaigns calling on banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investment from Israeli companies and from international companies involved in violating Palestinian rights.

Explaining her decision to leave, Shamilov told RI: "BDS was present before Josh Zinner joined ICCR. Out of the 300 plus members a number were involved in anti-Israel work – but these members did not use the ICCR name or platform.

"When Josh joined the organisation it became more political and more pronouncedly anti-Israel. Very openly so. Members involved in BDS asked the board for approval for the topic to be included at the 2017 ICCR conference.

"With Josh's support it was approved in December and BDS gained more visibility, a place on ICCR's website and a schedule at the conference. After that I made the decision to leave."

Zinner, for eight years the co-director of the New Economy Project, took over from previous CEO Laura Berry in January 2016.

Shamilov, a Russian Jew, said she was proud to be part of ICCR during her tenure. Her profile on the ICCR website quotes her saying: "ICCR is not afraid to go after the big guys and has a rich history of making changes in the corporate world. It's one of the qualities that drew me to the organization."

But given what she perceives as a change of stance at the organisation, she has decided to resign.

Shamilov's resignation comes as a Jewish-faith member of the ICCR called JLens Investor Network, which joined in 2015, has also voiced concerns to the organisation about hosting member discussions around BDS and Shamilov's resignation.

In 2016, Hammerman wrote an [article](#) in the Jerusalem Post which was highly critical of institutional investors' boycott of Israeli banks.

ICCR has shared the letter from JLens with its members. It describes the event that was criticized by JLens and Shamilov as being anti-Israel as a "member-led session during our Winter Conference on shareholder engagement with companies regarding settlement-related operations in the occupied territories of the West Bank".

The letter, from ICCR Board Chair Rev. Seamus Finn, says the discussions centred on engagements with companies on human rights risks of operations connected to West Bank settlements, given that numerous human rights organisations and the UN Security Council have concluded they violate international human rights conventions.

"The discussion was specific to settlements," says Finn. "And definitely not about 'pressuring companies with ties to Israel,' as alleged by JLens." Finn continues that "at no point during the session were the merits of BDS raised".

"Further, the BDS campaign is not, and has never been, included in ICCR's advocacy platform," he says. In a statement to RI, Finn said: "The allegations made by Julie Hammerman of JLens and former ICCR employee Gail Shamilov of anti-Israel discrimination and implied anti-Semitism are patently false and astonishingly reckless. These allegations are an intentional attempt to silence discussion of a complex human rights issue. Israeli settlements in the West Bank are a well-established violation of international humanitarian law as codified in the Geneva Conventions and affirmed by the International Court of Justice."

Zinner, who is of Jewish descent, described the ICCR as a big tent providing common ground to collaborate to drive social and environmental change.

"However, when members' interests diverge, they know that they always have the option of not participating in actions or discussions. The same holds true for our staff members," he said. "On a personal level, as a Jew I'm well aware of the complexity and sensitivity of this issue. However, as genuine interfaith dialogue requires, ICCR as an institution will never be intimidated into censoring or avoiding challenging discussions on legitimate human rights issues so long as they remain productive and respectful."

ICCR members are mainly Christian-faith based. In 2015, Azzad Asset Management joined as the first Islamic investment firm to be affiliated with the group. JLens is one of three Jewish faith organisations that are ICCR members.

JLens, which is also a PRI signatory having signed up in March last year as a service provider, describes itself as a network of over 9,000 individual and institutional investors who seek to apply a Jewish lens to the modern context of values-based impact investing. It was founded in 2012.

It runs the Jewish Advocacy Fund through which JLens advocates on behalf of Jewish communal concerns described as social, environmental and support for Israel. JLens says it is “the only investment organization speaking out against the abuse of responsible investing by the anti-Israel BDS movement”.

It’s headed by founder **Julie Hammerman**, who’s previously worked in investment banking at JP Morgan and Merrill Lynch. Its Director of Research is former MSCI ESG researcher Rachel Cohen.

Jewish-faith based member T’ruah told RI that it did not share the sentiment of the letter from JLens.

Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster, Director of Programmes at T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, said: “I’ve worked with the ICCR for 6-7 years. We have never experienced ICCR as an anti-Semitic or as an anti-Israel organisation. Those are of course two different things. Even organisations that we disagree with on Israel are not necessarily anti-Semitic.”

Kahn-Troster said that the ICCR was not a “pro-BDS organisation” and it understood the sensitivity of issues around Israel and didn’t make decisions about doing this type of engagement lightly.

“I was very, very surprised by the JLens letter,” she said. “I had not spoken to JLens in advance of the letter being issued.

“I believe in the integrity of the ICCR staff and their members and the way they make thoughtful decisions. So I found the accusations against them really unfair because I think they take their decisions very carefully and it was very hard to see these accusations.”

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