

October 26, 2023

Call for Urgent Action - Response of Women's Rights Organizations to UN WOMEN's Statement of October 13

This is a response to the statement issued by UN WOMEN on 13 October, which completely ignores the horrific situation of more than 220 innocent hostages, women, men and children, from the age of 9 months to 85 years old as well as the brutal attack and atrocities led by Hamas against Israeli citizens, including the murdering, raping and slaughtering of hundreds of women, mothers with their babies, children, elder women and people with disabilities. In addition to those murdered, thousands of people are severely injured. UN Women is an international organization that must stand with women of all ethnicities, citizenships, and backgrounds. It is inconceivable that a UN agency that is responsible for women's rights is ignoring the hostages captured and held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the murder of hundreds of innocent people.

On Saturday, October 7, Hamas initiated an attack against the State of Israel. Thousands of terrorists penetrated Israeli territory, raged the streets capturing and murdering hundreds of innocent civilians, entered homes, murdered and burned alive entire families, and kidnapped more than 220 women, men, infants, children, and elderly. In one case, a pregnant woman was stabbed, abused and her fetus was taken out of her body and shot. In addition, the terrorists attacked a nearby music festival at Kibbutz Re'im with over 3,000 attendees and gunned down and tracked hundreds civilians: young men and women who fled for their lives in an effort to find shelter. When the terrorists found them, they murdered these men and women in cold blood, and took many of them hostage and brought them to the Gaza Strip. Hamas killed and abducted civilians without regard to their sex, religion, age, or citizenship. Hamas has announced that it holds more than 100 hostages - among them babies, infants, and children - and the Islamic Jihad announced that it holds an additional 30 hostages. IDF Spokesperson's office confirmed that 220 Israelis have been kidnapped and are being held hostage in the Gaza Strip.

The numbers of those slaughtered are not yet final and continue to rise, and the magnitude of the atrocities is still unfolding.

The terrorists documented their atrocious actions with their phones, and these films show how the terrorists who attacked the music festival raped women whose bodies are covered in blood. The films taken by the terrorists who attacked the villages near the border show terrorists ripping the clothes off the women hostages, spitting on them, and sexually abusing them. Some of the women who were physically and sexually abused were kidnapped and are now prisoners of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, with no medical treatment or hygiene. The full scope of the sexual abuse of the hostages is not yet fully known and should be fully investigated according to international law. Young children were taken hostage, including babies, toddlers, and many children who have already spent more than sixteen nights held by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in captivity. Some of the children have been separated from their families and are alone, without anyone they know. The thoughts about what these hostages are going through at this moment are heart wrenching. Many of the hostages require medical treatment for their injuries and the violence they have undergone, medicine for their chronic illnesses and special infant formulas. Several of the hostages hold dual citizenship (including of the US, France, Italy, Thailand, Germany, and the UK) and several are not Israeli citizens, like the caregivers taken hostage with the elderly they care for.

Shani Louk is one of the many young women who were attacked. Shani Louk is an artist who danced at the peace music festival, she was last photographed dragged in the back of a pickup truck in Gaza city, unconscious, with Hamas terrorists spitting on and laughing at her broken body. There are rumors that Shani is still alive, being held in Gaza.

There is documented evidence of brutal acts of savagery against the abductees by the terrorist organizations. Hamas refuses to provide information on the identity of the hostages or their condition, as requested by the Red Cross. The mere information that we do have is maliciously collected from videos of atrocities released by Hamas. By doing so, Hamas forces the families and their allies, desperate for information about their loved ones, to expose themselves to additional acts of inhuman behaviors. Moreover, terrorist also live streamed the killing of civilians and posted it on the victims' Facebook wall. According to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006) and the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (A/RES/47/133), the abductees-hostages are defined by international law as victims of enforced disappearance. Enforced disappearance of persons, when carried out as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, is a crime against humanity, a blatant violation of international human rights law and humanitarian law, and a war crime. The aim of the attacks by Hamas was to target civilians and enforce cruel, inhumane, ISIS-like methods. This was not an incidental outcome of an attack against military forces. The terrorists' acts constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under Article 7(1)(c),(e),(f),(i), and (k), and Article 8(c)(if), (ii), and (iii), and Article 8(e)(i), (vi), and (xi) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and crimes under customary international law. Prohibition against hostage taking is also considered a customary rule by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), under Rule 96 on Hostage-Taking.

With respect to children, Article 77 determines that "Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The Parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason." This Article also states that children under the age of 15 years held by parties in conflict will be subject to the special protection afforded by this Article, whether they are prisoners of war or not.

A series of UN Security Council resolutions including UNSCR 1325, 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), and 2493 (2019), require special treatment for women, children, and defenseless individuals. This is stipulated in UNSCR 1820 (2008) which (a) recognizes sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war, (b) notes that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide, (c) stresses the need for the exclusion of sexual violence crimes from amnesty provisions in the context of conflict resolution processes, (d) calls upon the Member States to comply with their obligations for prosecuting persons responsible for such acts, to ensure that all victims of sexual violence, particularly women and girls, have equal protection under the law and equal access to justice, and (e) stresses the importance of ending impunity for such acts as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth, and national reconciliation. UN Resolution 1325 "calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict."

We, women's rights organizations that have operated in Israel in the past decades, as well as women's rights organizations around the world, cannot remain silent in the face of the suffering of innocent women and children wherever they are and the blatant disregard of the atrocities held by Hamas to Israeli citizens and the decision to ignore the hostage situation by UNWomen.

We strongly implore UNWomen - and all other human rights agencies - to gravely condemn the brutal attack and atrocities committed by Hamas to Israeli citizens as well as the abduction of innocent hostages, to urgently act to protect the special humanitarian rights of women and children,

and to do everything in their power to expose and recognize these atrocious and horrific acts of violence against women and girls and to bring the release of all hostages immediately.

Respectfully,

Israel Women's Network (IWN) || Dvora Institute for Gender and Sustainability || Rackman Center, Faculty of Law, Bar-Ilan University || The Sophie Davis Forum on Gender, Conflict Resolution and Peace, The Hebrew University || SID Israel || The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel || Her Academy: A vocational school for women coming out of prostitution and abuse || International women's forum (IWF) - Israel Chapter || Murder Victims Families Organization || NIVCHAROT || Female Lawyers Advocating for Change || Women's Spirit- Financial Independence for Women Survivors of Violence || Kolech - Religious Women's Forum || Ne'emanei Torah Va'avodah || medonna || CCW - Counseling Center for Women || Women and Bodies || Avoda Shava- promoting gender equality in work places || El HaLev || Directors Leading Change || Achoti (Sister) for Women in Israel || Wepower || The Israeli association of Feminist studies and gender research || The woman's courtyard || The Israeli Society of Victimology || Naamat Israel women's movement || NA'AMAT USA || Naamat Porto Alegre || Na'amat Brasil || Na'amat Canada || Na'amat Recife || WIPS - Center for the Advancement of Women in the Public Sphere || Mavoi Satum - Dead End || Forum Michal Sela || National Council of Jewish Women || FWMK law office || Hamiluimiyot || Mothers Against Violence || The NEHAMA Forum || 5050 Partnership for Gender Equality || Soroptimist internacional Israel || Gender Studies Program, Ben Gurion University of the Negev || Bat Kol - queer Jewish women || Task Force on Human Trafficking & Prostitution || Women of the Wall || The Forum for Law, Gender and Policy || DSC || Wizo Brazil || Kiverstein Institute || WIZO Women's Intranational Zionist Organization || Council of Women's Organizations in Israel || Politically Corret || MIXER Work & Lounge || Turning the Tables - for women exiting prostitution || Bonot alternative || impact.51 || Mothers with Meaning || Yazamiyot || Woman to Woman - Jerusalem Shelter for Battered Women || Yozmot Atid || We Cannot Stand Silent (NGO) || ProWoman || SSVAG - Survivors of Sexual Violence Advocacy Group || Temple Beth Shalom || Liga of russian speaking women in Israel || The Briah Foundation || Feminist Forum, Sapir Academic College || Financiar Acces SRL || Supersonas || Shula Mola || Chochmat Nashim || MAKOMnj || East Los Angeles women's Center || Hadassah Lylah chapter || Shiraz || The Israel women network || Galim ventilation and evacuation systems Ltd || Economic Empowerment for Women || Bodhi Foundation India || The Women Empowerment Music Project || Zioness Movement || Elluminate || IFLAC: International Fofum Forvthe Culture of Peace || 120 Women Leadership Council || Emma's Torch || Lada'at - Choose Well || ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal || The Clinic for Law, Gender and Social Change within the Clinical Center for Law and Society, The Israeli College of Management Academic Studies || Project Keshet || Jewish Women International (JWI) || Hadassah Foundation || Project Keshet Israel || National Council of Jewish Women Australia || Jindas || Women wage peace || Wwp || Friends of Sarah || Jewtina y Co. || jGirls+ Magazine || Women Wage Peace Brasil || Bronfman Foundation || Self || GUS || The Union of Advisors on the status of Women in Israel || Education || Zengo || WiSpace - Israeli Women In Space Association || Hadasit Medical Research Services Ltd || "Ukrainian –Wide Jewish Women's Organizations "Project Keshet" || Women's League for Conservative Judaism || Jewish Women's Foundation of New Jersey || NOGAFEM transforming women's health || IWN || The Miriam Fund || Opalios || The Clinical Legal Education Center, The Faculty of Law, Hebrew University of Jerusalem || Comunidad judia de chile || Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh || HERhealthEQ || Tel Aviv Museum of Art || Canadian Young Judaea || International Women's Fórum Mexico || Chabad San Jose || Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America || YWP – Young Women Politicians || Lab of Self || Hartman Institute || Israeli difference force || Jewish Women's Fund of Atlanta || Technologists for Justice || The Jewish Council for Public Affairs || mHealth Israel || The Center for Women's Justice || Imaha || The Shapira Foundation || Kol Achotenu - elevating Jewish women's voices || Simchat YM Congregation || Jyep || Forum of Hope - for cult survivors and their families || Jewish Women INVEST || Justice for All || Women In Mining Colombia || Jewish teachers organization || American Friends of Beit Issie Shapiro || Federation Jewish Woman || Luna Art Fund || La Leche League || WBAIS || Woman2Woman || Project on Gender, Culture, Religion and the Law, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, Brandeis University || Jewish Women's Aid || 120 Leaders Connected forum || JOFA - Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance || Hadassah Kings Point Tamarac || Jasmine organization