



ISRAEL WOMEN'S NETWORK  
لوبي النساء في إسرائيل  
שדולת הנשים בישראל



**W&W**  
Women and War Collective

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Analysis of the Israeli Government's Preparedness and Response to Acts of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in the Hamas Attack of October 7, 2023 and Policy Recommendations

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## Background

More than a year has passed since the October 7 attack against Israel by Hamas and the ensuing war, yet no official state commission of inquiry has been established. As a result, the entities responsible for the security of Israeli citizens have yet to officially identify the policy gaps that preceded the attack, the inadequate response and handling of the attack and its effects, and its consequences for Israel's civilian population. There is no official report, database, documentation, or record of the sexual violence that was perpetrated on October 7; There is no integrated state assistance program for the survivors of the attack or its indirect victims; and the public has no access to information on investigations or legal efforts to obtain justice for the victims.

In the absence of organized action by the government and its agencies to investigate these crimes of sexual violence and share information with the public, the **Israel Women's Network (IWN)** and the **Women & War Research and Documentation Collective** has compiled extensive information on the government's preparedness and actions to protect its citizens and soldiers from sexual violence during armed conflicts and captivity, the experiences of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and the treatment of its consequences and effects on survivors, their family members, and the community, and on the family members of victims who did not survive. In this report we outline the absent or lacking response of the government and its agencies since the attack on October 7. As we provide this information and point to the continued dysfunction of the government Israeli hostages remain in captivity and are subject to horrendous physical and sexual violence by their Hamas captors on a daily basis.

The IWN and the Women & War Collective collected and documented extensive information and testimonies regarding the sexual violence perpetrated on October 7, 2023. The research is the product of months of mapping, classification, analysis, and study of thousands of items of open-source information; reports by and meetings with international organizations; meetings with survivors; interviews with eye-witnesses and first responders; and meetings with forensic experts and various professionals. Members of IWN and the Collective participated in dozens of discussions, conferences, and site tours, collecting and compiling all the information in three databases that are regularly updated. The information is also based on two comprehensive reports that meet the UN's high standard of evidence: the report of the findings of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC) Ms. Pramila Patten (published in March 2024),<sup>1</sup> and the report of the Independent International Commission

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<sup>1</sup> Patten, P. (2024, March 4). Mission report: Official visit of the Office of the SRSG-SVC to Israel and the occupied West Bank - 14 February 2024. United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (published in June 2024).<sup>2</sup> The database also includes information from the report published by The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (published in February 2024).<sup>3</sup>

The review and analysis of the information by the IWN and the Women & War Collective paint a clear picture of the grave acts of CRSV that were committed in multiple locations in the Gaza Envelope on October 7, and acts of sexual violence perpetrated during captivity by Hamas. This report is based on this analysis and its clear implications. This is the unequivocal starting point of this report.

## Primary Aims

- 1** To provide an **independent, in-depth, evidence-based review** of the policy gaps and gaps in preparedness that preceded the attack, the absence of an adequate response to the attack, and the inadequate actions taken to address the short- and long-term implications of the sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas in the October 7 attack on Israel, including actions with respect to the men and women remaining in Hamas captivity.
- 2** To **map the state systems** that are responsible for leading the efforts to provide remedies and individual assistance to victims and their families, including recommendations for greater collaboration with women's rights organizations, international organizations, and Israeli NGOs.
- 3** To **make policy recommendations** based on the government's response to the CRSV of October 7 attack and propose recommendations to enhance professional public involvement, bring justice to victims and their families, adopt a victim-centered approach when assuming responsibility for and caring for the survivors, and issues related to documentation and memory.

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<sup>2</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (2024, June 14). Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (A/HRC/56/26). United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (2024, February). Silent Cry – Sexual Violence Crimes on October 7.

**This report acknowledges** the multi-dimensional implications of CRSV and the responsibility of the government and its institutions to guarantee the safety of its citizens and prepare for threats including CRSV; to involve the public in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes; and to provide adequate treatment to survivors, both individuals and communities. This report identifies the absence of state policy on CRSV before October 7, the failure of the government and its agencies to provide prompt or adequate treatment to the direct and indirect victims of the attack, and lack of public transparency of efforts to investigate and prosecute cases of CRSV.

# 1

## NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF UN AND ISRAELI GOVERNMENT RESOLUTIONS

The Israeli government failed to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, and neglected to make efforts to develop a knowledge base on this issue and incorporate the perspectives of professionals specializing in sexual violence.

The Israeli government failed to implement Israeli Government Resolution 2331 "Promoting Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming" (2014), and Resolution 1845 "Gender Mainstreaming in Policy Making and Decision Making in Times of Emergency" (2022), and disregarded repeated demands by civil society and feminist organizations to do, and their warnings of the potential consequences of non-implementation.

### Implications

Implementation of these resolutions would have incorporated professional and expert knowledge on CRSV into government systems' decision making and policy decisions, creating awareness and preparedness of the government, security forces, first responders, law enforcement agencies, and the legal system regarding the potential of CRSV and its implications. Such awareness is a prerequisite for the development of both preventive and responsive mechanisms operating in real time.

### Recommendations

1. Full implementation of the Women's Equal Rights Law and Government Resolutions 2331 and 1845, in collaboration with women's rights organizations and experts from academia and civil society representing diverse population groups.
2. Establish an inter-ministerial task force in collaboration with civil society experts to

document, research, and publish official data on the impact of the Hamas attack and the Iron Swords War on women in Israel. The task force will develop protocols for documentation, response, and training on women's protection, conflict resolution involvement, and integration into peace and recovery processes.

3. Design and publish a national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, incorporating lessons learned from the Iron Swords War.
4. Reinstate the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women under the Prime Minister's Office with national-level coordination responsibilities, during and after war.

## 2

### **LACK OF GOVERNMENT PREPAREDNESS FOR MASS CONFLICT-RELATED CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN GENERAL, INCLUDING CRSV AND OTHER WAR CRIMES**

#### **Implications**

An absence of government directives on addressing CRSV led to limited awareness and capacity of law enforcement agencies and search and rescue forces to handle sites of CRSV, resulting in improper treatment of bodies, management of survivors' hospital care, and evidence collection. Security and first-responder teams were unprepared for handling sites of CRSV, leading to the loss of forensic and digital evidence that might have facilitated fact-finding and other efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. As a result of their lack of preparedness, forces were challenged in their efforts to maintain ethical principles of care to victims and communities in the aftermath.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Increase awareness of the threat of war crimes and CRSV, and the need for preparedness. Israel should adopt international protocols for responding to, preventing, and addressing war crimes and sexual violence in conflict zones. This includes defining the responsible authorities and ensuring that civilians and military rescue, evacuation, and emergency forces receive proper training. We recommend the inclusion of women experts at every stage of this capacity-building process.
2. Train Israeli hospital staff and medical evacuation teams in treating survivors and victims of war crimes and CRSV. Training must also include knowledge and protocols for handling testimonies and survivors of such crimes, including the treatment of bodies. We recommend to expand the capacity of hospital-based

acute rooms to care for victims of sexual violence during large-scale attacks and collect evidence, and establish mobile acute rooms that can be deployed to affected combat zones. Additionally, expertise in war crimes and CRSV crimes must be embedded into medical training and emergency response protocols.

3. **Privacy and Ethics** – Rescue, evacuation, evidence collection, and treatment bodies must adhere to protocols that protect the privacy of victims, including the geographic and physical locations of harm; obtain consent from victims or their families regarding the sharing of findings; and ensure the reliability of reporting. We recommend to develop a comprehensive protocol on protecting the privacy rights of affected individuals, families, and communities. Future investigations and publications should strictly comply with a clear ethical code to restore ownership of information privacy to the victims, based on a victim-centered approach that prioritizes their needs above all other concerns.

## 3

### **FAILURE TO ESTABLISH AN INTEGRATIVE STATE AGENCY WITH THE AUTHORITY TO DOCUMENT AND ADDRESS THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL EFFECTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CRSV COMMITTED DURING THE HAMAS ATTACK OF OCTOBER 7.**

#### **Implications**

To date, the government has not established a dedicated team of experienced professionals and experts in the field of CRSV to provide comprehensive treatment and response, taking into consideration all aspects of CRSV. A dedicated governmental team would have coordinated data collection and documentation efforts, issued official reports, led legislative efforts and prosecution of the war criminals, and served as the official source of information and treatment on all aspects of sexual violence. The absence of an official professional state investigation of the events created a void that was quickly filled by misinformation, rumors, and half-truths, causing injustice to the victims and inhibiting the healing and rehabilitation of individuals and communities.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Immediately publish an official state report that meets international professional standards on the findings of the investigation into CRSV during the October 7th attack, as known so far, while protecting the privacy of the victims and communities. Alongside the findings, the public should be updated and informed about the status of the investigation, legislation, prosecution options, and the handling of the issue.

2. Establish a management team to ensure that continued and comprehensive support is provided to the victims of CRSV from the October 7th attack and that information is documented ethically and confidentially, to prevent loss of information, denial of injustices, concealment, and perpetuation of both individual and collective traumas. We recommend that the body to be established build on the work conducted so far by women's rights organizations and feminist NGOs in civil society with expertise in this field.

## 4

### **THE GOVERNMENT'S APPROPRIATION OF CRSV CRIMES IN SERVICE OF NATIONAL ADVOCACY AIMS DIVERTED RESOURCES FROM EFFORTS TO INVESTIGATE AND PROSECUTE THE PERPETRATORS AND SECURE THE RETURN OF THE HOSTAGES.**

#### **Implications**

The government focused attention and resources on leveraging the incidents of CRSV to support its global advocacy efforts, rather than on taking responsibility for the response and treatment efforts, collecting evidence, and collaborating with CRSV experts and women's rights organizations. This approach over-estimated the importance of influencing immediate international responses to the events, and was adopted at the expense of a long-term strategy to uncover the truth, gain recognition of the crimes, bring justice for the victims, and impose sanctions against terrorist organizations, and as a result led to the dissemination of uncorroborated information and undermined international recognition of the CRSV on October 7. Moreover, publication of incomplete and unverified information was leveraged by a global campaign denying the crimes of CRSV on October 7.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Establish a team of experts including feminist women's rights organizations that support survivors of sexual assault, to provide guidance on the discourse and framing of CRSV. The team will be responsible for providing reliable information to the public that meets privacy and ethical standards to protect survivors and communities, on the basis of a victim-centered approach. The team will ensure to distinguish discussions on CRSV from debates on the aims of war and its management, in order to prevent any linkage between the two.
2. Adopt a victim-centered approach, the Murad Code guidelines, and current ethical guidelines by the Israeli advocacy framework, state and military spokespeople, and all official entities involved in mediating Hamas' war crimes to international media and other bodies, with an emphasis on CRSV, to ensure that the privacy of victims and communities is maintained.

# 5

## **THE GOVERNMENT MADE NO EFFORT TO REACH OUT TO COOPERATE WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES EXPERIENCED IN INVESTIGATIONS OF CRSV.**

### **Implications**

With the exception of a single UN committee, the government of Israel granted no international organizations access to testimonies, evidence, or findings from the attack sites. The lack of collaboration with international investigators such as the UN, human rights organizations and local and international women's rights organizations exacerbated the government's lack of response and the void in governmental leadership, which further delayed fact-finding efforts and the efforts to gain international recognition of the crimes. Prosecution of the war criminals and imposition of international sanctions is performed by investigative agencies that are given access to the crime scenes, and the government's findings and evidence. In cases of CRSV, cooperation with international organizations and entities also weakens the war criminals' standing and legitimacy.

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop a protocol for recognizing crimes of violence and CRSV, jointly with international bodies such as investigative committees of aid organizations, humanitarian organizations, human rights organizations, and various UN committees, in view of the importance of exposing the truth, recognizing crimes for the purpose of bringing justice to victims, and applying international mechanisms for punishment and sanctions. The protocol should enable cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, security bodies, the Israeli military, and law enforcement with civilian investigative bodies.
2. Invite Ms. Pramila Patten, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to complete the investigation of sexual violence crimes on October 7th.

# 6

## **FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE THE PUBLIC'S ROLE OR INVOLVE THE PUBLIC IN FACT-FINDING AND INVESTIGATION OF THE CRSV IN THE OCTOBER 7 ATTACK VIOLATES THE VICTIMS' RIGHTS AND IMPEDES HEALING, RECOVERY, AND REBUILDING OF RESILIENCE.**

### **Implications**

In May 2024, a gag order was imposed on the investigation of the war crimes and



CRSV in the October 7 attack. The absence of a procedure or a team to coordinate, update, and disseminate information to the public on the scope of the sexual war crimes of October 7 undermines the prosecution of the war criminals, and violates the victims' right to the truth and the much-needed acknowledgment of their experiences. Recognition is a significant step in the healing and reconciliation of victims and communities in conflict, and is necessary for the recovery of national resilience by a grieving society in mourning.

## **Recommendations**

1. Establish a state inquiry committee for the October 7th events, including a dedicated investigative process for war crimes and CRSV, and involve the public in the process, based on the importance of truth, justice, and transparency as components of healing and recovery.
2. Fund and establish a public database that includes testimonies, reports, and all information related to CRSV crimes during the attack, in accordance with privacy regulations, under the National Library's documentation project. This database will professionally organize all materials, including sealed collections, for archiving and historical documentation, and to support legal proceedings, and proper commemoration. The database should follow strict archiving standards according to European Union regulations.

# **7**

## **THE GOVERNMENT ABANDONED THE WOMEN AND MEN VICTIMS OF CRSV WHO REMAIN IN HAMA CAPTIVITY.**

### **Implications**

After the return of several hostages in the hostage deal with Hamas in December 2023, information emerged about the sexual abuse suffered by the hostages, including the women who were not included in the deal and who now have been in captivity for more than a year. The women and men hostages who remain in Hamas captivity are continuously subjected to physical and sexual violence. Unprotected, their lives are under immediate threat. The government must use all efforts possible to secure the immediate release of all hostages

## Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

**This report is published** more than one year after the Hamas attack of October 7. In the absence of an official state investigative commission and in view of the unprecedented nature of the events that included systematic CRSV, the Israel Women's Network and the Women & War Collective believe that it is imperative to analyze and call public attention to the government's failure to address the CRSV perpetrated on October 7, in order to draw the necessary conclusions, and urgently implement the recommendations outlined in the report.

The brutality and cruelty of the October 7 attack and its consequences forced government agencies, security forces, and civil society in Israel to deal with unprecedented challenges. This report identifies the optimal preparations that would have facilitated effective responses to the events, both in the immediate aftermath of the attack and in the ensuing months. The report also references relevant international case studies and protocols that should be studied in order to gain a better understanding and support preparedness for threats of this kind. The grave results of the attack underscore the need for integrated and coordinated state mechanisms to ensure effective emergency efforts, complemented by civil society mechanisms.

This report clarifies that absence of adequate preparedness and absence of a rapid, professional response on behalf of the government triggered the immediate emergence of effective and complementary civil society organizations that addressed various needs related to CRSV – location and identification of victims and hostages, compilation of lists of fatalities and missing persons, responses to inquiries by survivors and their families, shadow diplomacy, compilation of evidence and report writing, fact checking and liaising with the media and international organizations. **STILL, THERE IS NO TRUE SUBSTITUTE FOR PROFESSIONAL GOVERNMENTAL INTEGRATION BY STATE AUTHORITIES WORKING TO THOSE ENDS THROUGH A FUNDED INTER-MINISTERIAL TEAM THAT MAINTAINS CLOSE TIES WITH WOMEN'S RIGHTS NGOS AND PROMOTES FULL TRANSPARENCY FOR THE PUBLIC.**

By establishing a professional task force to focus on the multi-dimensional implications of CRSV, including implications at the treatment, legal, and security levels, the government will signal its responsibility to provide security to its citizens. Finally, based on the information collected by the Collective and the IWN, we call for the urgent release of the men and women hostages that remain in the captivity of the terrorist organization Hamas, and are continually subject to all types of cruel violence including gender violence.

Israel, in a perpetual conflict zone, should use the Hamas attack of October 7 as a turning point that highlights the need for a gender mainstreaming strategy for routine and emergency times

in order to guarantee the safety of children, youngsters, and women. **THE WOMEN OF ISRAEL MUST BECOME PARTNERS IN DESIGNING A NATIONAL SECURITY APPROACH AND IN DECISION MAKING RELATED TO THE SAFETY AND PHYSICAL INTEGRITY OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.**

Adoption by state authorities of the recommendations outlined in this report will contribute to the optimization of the treatment of the victims and survivors of the October 7 attack and will direct public attention to CRSV and its painful implications for survivors, communities, and contribute to the rebuilding of the resilience of Israeli society as a whole. We stress that our most important obligation is to ensure the return of the hostages, who have been and continue to be subject to serious physical and sexual violence at the hands of Hamas captors.

## About the Israel Women's Network

For more than four decades, the Israel Women's Network (IWN) has promoted gender justice and a more equitable society in Israel through legal means, policy and legislation, public consciousness raising, and free legal aid to women in order to reduce gender inequality in Israel. Since the outbreak of the October 7 war, the IWN has expanded its work on several levels: The newly established 'Alice Line', a multi-lingual helpline that assists women in exercising their wartime-related rights, has helped thousands of women to date; The IWN established an international department and issued multiple calls, supported by more than 170 organizations worldwide, for an international investigation of the CRSV perpetrated on October 7 and in captivity, with the aim of achieving justice for the victims; The IWN participated in grassroots initiatives and projects including the Women & War Collective's research and documentation project, and the Dinah Project – Recognition and Justice for Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

## About the Women & War Collective

The Women & War Research and Documentation Collective unites senior academic scholars, legalists, social and political activists, and intelligence and security experts who came together in November 2023 as volunteers to investigate and document the gender aspects of the October 7 attack, including acts of violence that included CRSV. The decision to work as an independent, volunteer-based, non-governmental team was also the result of the understanding the state authorities in Israel failed to respond with the necessary speed and professional expertise in this complex and sensitive field in order to investigate, collect evidence, and effectively document the acts of CRSV. Members of the Collective are Dr. Sarai Aharoni, Ms. Shira Barbivai-Shacham, Ms. Tal Hochman, Dr. Tal Nitzan, Ms. Tal Raviv, and Dr. Inbal Vilimovsky.



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