

Residents of Israel

Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War during the October 7 Hamas Attacks | Position Paper

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The position paper brings together the various accounts and reports made public so far. These include the testimonies of survivors who witnessed acts of sexual violence, descriptions by security and emergency personnel, and visual accounts that were circulated online.

The Position Paper (English)

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched an indiscriminate and murderous attack. In the weeks since, as we continue to experience personal and collective sorrow – much like all other residents of this land – we have been collecting information regarding the events of that horrific Saturday. In doing so, we seek to piece together the complete picture of the violence perpetrated.

As a human rights organization morally driven to defend the right to health of all people living between the river and the sea, our professional obligation is to investigate, analyze, and acknowledge any violation of this right. This position paper highlights the sexual and gender-based violence committed during the October 7 Hamas attacks. Our primary concern in doing so is addressing the pain and the physical and emotional needs of the victims of the violence – and those who witnessed it – on their long road to healing.

The position paper brings together the various accounts and reports made public so far. These include the testimonies of survivors who witnessed acts of sexual violence, descriptions by security and emergency personnel, and visual accounts that were circulated online. Of course, the information published to date is only partial. This is both due to a lack of systematic analysis of the findings for forensic evidence of sexual abuse and due to the conditions of some of the victims' bodies and the urgency of identifying and evacuating them – sometimes under fire.

Yet, even if the available information is partial, it is our duty to already address the events. We must acknowledge that sexual and gender-based violence was a part of the October 7 attacks. We must present all currently-known information to encourage further documentation and reporting and to urge the investigation of the incidents as crimes against humanity. Additionally, we seek to highlight the importance of ensuring the health care system's preparedness to offer adequate, professional, and informed treatment to all individuals who have experienced or witnessed sexual and gender-based crimes. Finally, we reiterate the urgency – including within this context – of releasing the hostages currently held in Gaza. Those who experienced or witnessed sexual violence require urgent medical and mental health care – which they are likely presently being denied.

As members of the health and human rights communities, it is our duty to stand with the victims. As a society, we must be willing to acknowledge the sexual violence perpetrated on October 7, 2023. We must break the cycles of silence and shame and foster the space and conditions to support the healing of survivors.

Physicians for Human Rights - Israel (PHRI)

P.-S.

- Physicians for Human Rights - Israel (PHRI). 26.11.2023 : <https://www.phr.org.il/en/gender-based-violence-eng/>
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