

Open Letter to the Israeli and U.S. Governments and Others Weaponizing the Issue of Rape

Friday 1 March 2024, by [Feminists, Jews, Anti-zionists](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2024).

All too often in the fog of war, the brutality of sexual assault and rape is lost in the public eye, and bringing these abuses to light is something for which feminists have fought for decades. Complicating this issue, however, is the fact that accusations of sexual assault have also been wielded as a tool of war - and as an (often lethal) weapon of racism and colonialism.

In its current war against the people of Gaza, the Israeli government has chosen to weaponize the issue of sexual violence for political outcome. The statement below will be delivered to officials of the Israeli government who have mounted a public crusade manipulating this issue to both legitimize - and divert attention from - their campaign of ethnic cleansing, to dehumanize Palestinians, and to vilify those who criticize their actions. It will also be sent to U.S. officials, prominent public figures and others who, with intention or misguidedly, have joined the fray by demonizing a variety of feminist organizations and individuals. In some cases, these attacks have included orchestrated campaigns to withdraw funding for critical work. They have also fueled harassment and doxing of staff or board members that, reprehensibly, has included threats of rape and death.

The statement was initiated by U.S.-based anti-zionist Jewish feminists who believe we have a particular responsibility to speak out in support of Palestinian rights and against the current genocide. It has since garnered support from across the U.S. and throughout the world. Many of the signers have worked on or researched the issue of sexual violence for decades. Many have directly supported survivors and/or are survivors ourselves. Collectively, we are accustomed to holding complicated realities in our minds, which we believe to be a necessary practice in a complex and unjust world.

The signers of this statement stand together both in condemning all instances of war crimes - including sexual violence - and in defending those who are under attack for challenging Israel's deadly assault on Palestinians.

In the face of these attempts to intimidate or discredit us, we refuse to be silenced.

OPEN LETTER TO THE ISRAELI AND U.S. GOVERNMENTS AND OTHERS WEAPONIZING THE ISSUE OF RAPE

We, the undersigned, are responding to the disgraceful coordinated offensive currently being leveled against feminist, women's advocacy, Jewish anti-zionist, and other organizations, agencies and

individuals, accusing us of “failing to condemn” reported systematic sexual assaults of Israeli women and children in the brutal October 7 attack by Hamas. We repudiate the attempts by the Israeli government, and its apologists, to delegitimize our work, defund social justice and feminist organizations, and undermine our demands that Israel cease its genocidal massacre of Palestinians.

Whether we identify as feminists, as Jews, as anti-zionists, as all of the above, or as allies, and wherever we are based in the world, we proclaim that we can hold many truths simultaneously in our heads and in our hearts; that is what we do every minute of every day. We excoriate rape and all forms of sexual assault against anyone of any gender or age – whether perpetrated by Hamas, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) or anyone else. We also excoriate carpet bombing of civilians, deadly blockades of food, water and fuel, use of illegal chemical weapons, targeted murders of journalists and aid workers, decimation of homes, hospitals, schools, houses of worship, infrastructure and entire family lines, annihilation of culture, kidnapping and hostage-taking, and all war crimes when committed by any party."

For those of us who are Jewish, we embrace our Jewish identity and its history of facing down injustice and we also condemn the actions of the state created in our name that was birthed in massacre and mass expulsion, that has maintained a stifling, racist and dehumanizing occupation for 75 years, and that is currently conducting mass murder of civilians daily with impunity.

WE CONDEMN RAPE - JUST AS WE CONDEMN EVERY WAR CRIME.

Sexual assault is devastating. Whether perpetrated by state or non-state actors; by strangers, acquaintances, friends or family members; by teachers, coaches, supervisors, co-workers or religious figures of any faith; by police, prison guards, soldiers or guerrilla fighters – we are very familiar with its enduring legacies of trauma and upheaval. And we condemn it equally in every instance.

We believe survivors and we believe reporting that results from investigations conducted by trained feminist and human rights experts who have no agenda other than to clearly and accurately document and convey the gravity of gender-based violence. Sexual assault is pervasive – even commonplace. It is rarely met with the outrage that its incidence, impact and enormity merit. And, history is also replete with examples of rape charges being wielded by stakeholders in armed conflict to render the “enemy” more monstrous – and thus as deserving of ever-more depraved forms of militarized violence. This tactic is as old as war itself. And this means that there are many reasons to distrust either the selective outrage – or protestations of innocence – of either governments or militias, or their respective propaganda organs, when it comes to sexual assault. There is an urgent need for increased public consciousness about how such outrage is mobilized during periods of conflict, and/or to legitimize racist agendas. And there is equivalent need for public awareness during moments when outrage is conspicuously absent – such as when members of those very governments or militias are accused of sexual abuses within their own ranks.

Israel’s current campaign to discredit feminists – especially feminists of color, Arab feminists and Jewish anti-zionist feminists – and others critical of its lethal offensive against Palestinians is insulting and dishonest, but it is nothing new. We see it for what it is: a cynical attempt to incite public fury and deflect attention from the genocide it is perpetrating. And far too many public figures and elected officials have allowed themselves to become participants in this onslaught of accusations against us.

So, let us once again make ourselves clear: We condemn rape. We condemn genocide. And we also condemn the opportunistic manipulation of the issue of sexual assault by those committing war crimes themselves – or by anyone else.

We support the investigation initiated by the highly-qualified members of the U.N. Commission of Inquiry into the entire range of war crimes committed during both the October 7 Hamas attack and the Israeli state's subsequent assault on Gaza – an effort in which Israel thus far has refused to participate. We also support additional inquiries into these sexual assault allegations conducted by impartial feminist and human rights authorities with proven expertise in, and sensitivity about, sexual violence, as well as provision of a comprehensive range of services for all survivors by those explicitly trained in addressing sexual trauma. Additionally, we urge investigation into reported atrocities by both Israeli military personnel and non-state actors – including vigilante settler groups – throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Finally, we continue to raise our voices as part of the world-wide call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages and political prisoners, termination of U.S. military aid to Israel and an end to Israeli apartheid.

Below is a list of initial signers of this statement.

The list will be updated periodically.

We encourage you to share this effort and invite others to sign on.

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Sue Finch, Women in Black London (UK)*

Stine Sampers, Artist and Curator (Belgium)

Caroline Poland (UK)

Shereen Mills (South Africa)

Flore Pellan, Médiatrice Familiale (France)*

Lisa Fithian, Independent Organizer (US)

Martha Kostmayer, Independent Advocate (US)

Dr Katherine Combellick (US)

James C Faris, Professor Emeritus, Univ. of Connecticut (US)

Anna Reumert, PhD, Anthropology, The New School (US)*

Jaime M. Grant, Ph. D., Activist; Public Intellectual (US)

Peter Lehu, Director, Warminster Township Free Library-Bucks County, PA (US)*

Carolyn Weaver (US)

Linda Damico, PhD (US)

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Helaine Meisler, Jewish Activist (US)

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Susan Turansky (Canada)

Eva Sharell, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

Phd Judy Haiven, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

Daina Green, Member, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

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Helene Kendler (US)

Anne Henderson, Filmmaker (Canada)

Sid Shniad, Member, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

Laura Sky (Canada)

Nelun Gunasekera, Independent Consultant on Gender and Social Inclusion (Sri Lanka)

Prof. Randa Farah (Canada)

Jane Hirschmann, Co-Chair, The Freedom to Boycott NYS Coalition (US)*

Patrice Jones, VINE Sanctuary (US)*

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Murray Hogben (Canada)

Rabbi David Mivasair (Canada)

Hafsah Muheed, Independent Advocate (Sri Lanka)

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Sally Bowden-Schaible, Mental Health Counselor (US)

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Prof. Jill Glessing, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto (Canada)*

Adwoa Toku (Canada)

Jamie Hill, Independent Advocate (Canada)

Zoë Lepiano, Independent Advocate (Canada)

Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, Ph.D., Professor Emerita, University of Florida; Peace Advocate (US)

Heather Dancey (Canada)

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Sasha Lofquist, Human Rights Advocate, Independent Advocate (Canada)

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Mary Patten, Professor and Artist (US)

Sonali Gulati, Independent Filmmaker (US)

Elizabeth Scott, LCSW, Independent Activist (US)

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Miriam Meir, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

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Kati Tihane (Canada)

Emily Hall, Healthcare Professional (Canada)

Anne Richter, Member, Pax Christi (US)

Larry French, Retired Teachers Union Professional (Canada)

Zaira Menin (Italia)

Rev. Dr. Myke Johnson (US)

Martina Di Stefano (Italy)

Beth Cagan (US)

Steve Cagan, Independent Advocate (US)

Susan Ram, Writer and Journalist (France)

Cheryl Clarke, Black Feminist Poet (US)

Cheryl Gaster, Member, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

Marilyn Birmingham, Feminist, Activist, Mother (Canada)

Michael Rosen (Canada)

Marie Lloyd, Member, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

Rafi Silver, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)*

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AfroLatin/AfroCaribbean Survivor Network (US)*

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Prof. Susan Petrilli, Università di Bari “Aldo Moro” (Italy)*

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Jae Shepherd, Abolishing Patriarchal Violence Table with the Movement for Black Lives (US)*

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Sylvia Skrepichuk, Catholics for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land (Canada)*

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Craig Clark (US)

Martha Fusca (Canada)

Dee Roye, Independent (UK)

Santamano Bhikkhu, Buddhist Monk (UK)

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Prof. Shaker Farah (Brazil)

Dr. Carol Schwartz (Canada)

Edward Stepanian (US)

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Virginia Monk (Canada)

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Sophy Gairdner (UK)

Murray Lumley, Independent Advocate (Canada)

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John Obeda (US)

Tanner Vogelgesang (Canada)

Cynthia Edwards, Independent Advocate (Canada)

Murray Edwards (Canada)

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Artist Sarah Hall (Canada)

Olga Khodyreva (Canada)

Ms. Sherrill Futrell, Independent Advocate (US)

Deni Sevenoaks, Radical Feminist Against All Forms of Sexual Violence; Independent Advocate (Australia)

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Shoshana Handel (US)

Moth Anselmo (Canada)

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Wesley Parish (New Zealand)

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Teghan Yanover (Canada)

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Andrea Marx-Abbott (Germany / Canada)

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Prabha Khosla (Canada)

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Patrick Schreck (Canada)

Diana Ralph, Ph.D., Or Haneshamah Congregation (Canada)*

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Ms. Hendrica Okondo, Independent Advocate (Kenya)

Sylvia Tenuta (Canada)

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Stance Ravening (Canada)

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Raghavendra Karkala, Independent Visual Artist (Canada)

Tom Webb (Canada)

Martin Scott (Canada)

Laura Squires (Turtle Island)

Rosa Bertha Diaz, Independent (Canada)

Nanti Swiss (US)

Sylvia Schlittke (Canada)

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Margaret Dorfman, MD (US)

Ellen Ackerman, Jewish Feminist (USQ)

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Colleen Fuller, Independent Health Policy Researcher (Canada)

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Sue Leigh, Independent Advocate (Australia)

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Grete Zemans (US)

Rick Sprout (US)

David Kalant, Independent Jewish Voices & Amnesty International (Canada)*

Amanda Schmelz, Actress (Mexico)

H.Toni Norton (US)

Emma Jackson, Feminist Advocate (UK)

Sam Friedman, Member, Ukraine Solidarity Network (US)*

Kohenet Sharon Jaffe (US)

Marie-Suzanne Trecroce (Canada)

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Ariana Ali-Harris, Independent Advocate (US)

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M F Mcininch (Canada)

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Hibaaq Osman, Founder/CEO Karma (Somalia)

Dr. Teresa Langle de Paz, CEO Women for Africa Foundation (Spain)

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Ary Kerman, RN, PHN (US)

Emily Galloway (US)

Nikita Mitchell, Independent Advocate (US)

Andrea Levy, Independent Scholar (Canada)

Lily May (Canada)

JoAnn Loulan, Executive Director, Democratic Messaging Project (US)

Jeff White (US)

Kathleen Peratis, Jewish Currents* (US)

Eleanor Heath (Canada)

*Affiliation included for identification purposes only

The
list of additional signers that will continue to be updated periodically.

Names are listed in the order in which they were received.

Please click here if you would like to add your name.

P.S.

- <https://stopmanipulatingsexualassault.org/#signers>
- Please click here if you would like to add your name.:https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeJfU_ooRqCKA8u3-PB8mV0FBkqoBelFN1VH_u3-MqWWQdFXQ/viewform