Manchin, Bipartisan Collegues Condemn United Nations' Inaction On Hamas' Sexual Violence Against Women

December 12, 2023

Office of Senator Joe Manchin

<https://www.manchin.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/manchin-bipartisan-collegues-condemn-united-nations-inaction-on-hamas-sexual-violence-against-women#:~:text=%E2%80%9CWe%20write%20to%20express%20our,the%20Senators%20said%20in%20part>.

Yesterday, U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) joined his bipartisan colleagues in a letter condemning the inaction of the United Nations (UN) regarding Hamas’s widespread sexual violence, including mass rape and mutilation, against women in Israel on October 7, 2023. The Senators urged UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to open an independent investigation into Hamas’s acts of sexual violence and to hold the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), an organization dedicated to ending gender-based violence, accountable for its failure to immediately and unequivocally condemn Hamas’s atrocities against women.

‘We write to express our profound disappointment with the United Nations’ (UN) response to Hamas’s widespread sexual violence, including rape and mutilation, as a weapon of war against women in Israel on October 7, 2023,’ **the Senators said in part.** ’Sexual violence, particularly on this scale and of this level of brutality, must be condemned unequivocally and without qualification, which is why we were shocked that it took UN Women nearly two months to speak out against these atrocities. An independent investigation is a necessary step to hold perpetrators accountable, support survivors, and provide justice for victims.’

In addition to Senator Manchin, the letter is also signed by Senators Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Susan Collins (R-ME), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), Katie Britt (R-AL), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), James Risch (R-ID), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Bob Casey (D-PA), Mike Crapo (R-ID), John Fetterman (D-PA), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), James Lankford (R-OK), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Rick Scott (R-FL), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Tim Scott (R-SC), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Bill Hagerty (R-TN), Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN).

**The full letter can be found below.**

Dear Secretary Guterres:

We write to express our profound disappointment with the United Nations’ (UN) response to Hamas’s widespread sexual violence, including rape and mutilation, as a weapon of war against women in Israel on October 7, 2023.  As the international community observes the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence intended to ‘call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls’, we urge you to immediately launch an independent investigation into sexual violence committed by Hamas. We additionally urge you to hold UN Women, which is a leading UN organization dedicated to ending gender-based violence, accountable for its failure to immediately and unequivocally condemn Hamas’s brutal use of sexual violence.

A growing body of evidence including the testimonies of survivors, witnesses, and first responders makes clear that as part of Hamas’s terrorist attack that killed 1,200 men, women, and children on October 7, the terrorist organization intentionally used rape and sexual assault as weapons of war. Israeli police have gathered more than 1,500 testimonies from witnesses and medics, as well as forensic evidence demonstrating that rape and sexual assaults took place. Testimonies include one witness who described an account of a gang rape that took place at the Nova music festival site and footage showing mutilated bodies exhibiting signs of women being raped before they were executed.

As multiple UN Security Council Resolutions affirm, the use of sexual violence as is a war crime under international law. Hamas’s premeditated campaign of systematic sexual violence on October 7 clearly meets this standard. Sexual violence, particularly on this scale and of this level of brutality, must be condemned unequivocally and without qualification, which is why we were shocked that it took UN Women nearly two months to speak out against these atrocities. However, it took 57 days for UN Women to denounce Hamas. This came a week after the organization issued an initial statement condemning Hamas, only to delete the post and replace it with a halfhearted statement that dropped any mention of Hamas. Moreover, the organization has taken no meaningful steps to provide support to the Israeli survivors of sexual violence. UN Women’s failure to publicly stand with Israeli women undermines its legitimacy and contributes to the outrageous effort by some to dismiss, downplay, or outright deny these atrocities.

While we note your November 30 statement calling for prosecution of Hamas for its abhorrent acts of sexual violence, we have serious concerns that the UN body tasked with investigating these crimes is the permanent Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The COI includes an appointed Commissioner who has used antisemitic tropes and questioned the right of the State of Israel to be a member of the UN. Given that the COI has a history of bias and unfairly singling out Israel, we urge you to move swiftly to seek the establishment of an independent fact-finding effort through a separate mechanism, tasked with collecting testimonies from survivors and witnesses of Hamas’s sexual violence. An independent investigation is a necessary step to hold perpetrators accountable, support survivors, and provide justice for victims.

The UN’s delay in denouncing Hamas’s sexual violence and rape on October 7 is a moral failure. Tasking the one-sided COI to investigate these atrocities undermines the effort’s credibility, creates the strong potential for biased outcomes, and provides no measure of justice for the victims and survivors. In addition to holding UN Women’s leadership accountable for their weeks-long failure to condemn sexual violence committed by Hamas, we call on you to immediately launch a full and independent investigation that holds Hamas accountable for sexual violence committed against Israeli women. We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.