‘Right now someone is being raped in a tunnel’: Knesset hears of Hamas sex crimes

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Israeli women held hostage in the Gaza Strip are being subjected to regular sexual abuse, with their guards treating them like “dolls,” survivors of October 7 testified in the Knesset on Tuesday, adding to a growing body of evidence that Hamas weaponized sexual assault and is likely still violating victims in captivity.

“I saw it with my own eyes,” said former hostage Aviva Siegel, who was abducted from Kibbutrz Kfar Aza with her husband Keith on October 7 and [released](https://www.timesofisrael.com/taken-captive-aviva-and-keith-siegel-anglo-kibbutz-couple/) during a ceasefire in late November.

“I felt as if the girls in captivity were my daughters. The terrorists bring inappropriate clothes, clothes for dolls and turn the girls into their dolls. Dolls on a string with which you can do whatever you want, whenever you want,” she told a meeting of the newly established Knesset caucus on victims of sexual and gender violence in the war against Hamas.

“I can’t breathe, I can’t deal with it, it’s too hard. It’s been nearly four months and they are still there,” she said.

“I’m still there. My body is there. The boys also go through abuse — what the girls go through. Maybe they don’t get pregnant [but] they are also puppets on a string.”

Aviva’s daughter, Shir, told lawmakers that her mother’s testimony was “only the tip of the iceberg,” and expressed anger that ministers were not present to hear the accounts.

The hostages “are sitting in captivity, they have not done anything wrong! We have no right to just sit here, we need to scream for them. Right now there is someone being raped in a tunnel,” declared Shir, who was away from the kibbutz on the day of the Hamas onslaught.

“Where are the really important people? The decision makers who sit in the cabinet and aren’t hearing this?” she asked.

Aviva, whose husband Keith remains in Hamas captivity, told the Knesset’s Caucus for the Hostages earlier this month that she had [personally witnessed another hostage being tortured](https://www.timesofisrael.com/former-hostage-tells-lawmakers-fellow-captive-was-sexually-abused-by-guard/) during her time in captivity.

During her earlier testimony, Siegel described how at one point in their captivity, a younger female hostage returned from using the bathroom and looked distraught. But when she attempted to give the girl a hug, a terrorist guarding them intercepted her and prevented the embrace.

“I saw that she was withdrawn, quiet and not herself,” Siegel said. “And excuse my language, but this son of a bitch had touched her. And he didn’t even let me hug her after it happened. It’s terrible, simply terrible. I told her I was sorry.”

Hamas engaged in [widespread sexual assault](https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-harrowing-detail-nyt-shows-weaponization-of-rape-sexual-violence-during-oct-7/) during its attack on southern Israel, when thousands of terrorists invaded by land, sea, and air, killing 1,200 people — a majority of them civilians — and taking 253 others hostage into Gaza.

Israel believes over 130 hostages remain in Gaza — though not all of them alive. The IDF has confirmed the deaths of 28 of those still held by Hamas, citing new intelligence and findings obtained by troops operating in Gaza.

Some of the women who remain in Gaza have stopped getting their periods, [Chen Goldstein Almog](https://www.timesofisrael.com/taken-captive-4-almog-family-members-abducted-2-killed/), who was released alongside three of her four children during the ceasefire, said during Tuesday’s hearing.

“Maybe that’s what we should be praying for, that it’s the body protecting itself so that, God forbid, they will not be able to get pregnant,” she said.

[Speaking to Channel 12](https://www.timesofisrael.com/we-will-never-forgive-freed-hostages-describe-intense-fear-in-gaza-captivity/) last month, Goldstein Almog said that while in captivity, her 17-year-old daughter Agam had feared being raped or sexually abused — and that their captors taunted the 17-year-old that she would be “married off” to someone in Gaza and that they would “find [her] a husband.”

“There were girls there who were alone, alone for 50 days, 19-year-olds, alone, who went through difficult things, personally. They were violated, harmed, some were injured,” Chen said at the time, adding that men also suffered abuse and torture.

In testimony screened during the Knesset Hostages Caucus hearing earlier this month, Agam Goldstein-Almog described how at one point she and her mother were moved into a tunnel where six women were being held.

“Many girls underwent severe sexual abuse,” she said. “They had serious and complex wounds that were not being cared for.”

Adi Arad, an actress and singer who has been active on behalf of the hostages, told Tuesday’s hearing that the mother of one of the hostages asked her if it was possible to send abortion pills to Gaza via the Red Cross.

“We may find ourselves here in a few months in the Knesset holding discussions that I don’t want to think about,” said MK Shelly Tal Meron (Yesh Atid), one of the organizers of the hearing.

“It could be discussions on terminating pregnancies in the coming months. It could be discussions with the rabbinate about the religion of the babies who may be born here or there. It could be about the legal standing of these babies who may be born,” Tal Meron said, arguing that it was imperative to prevent this.

“We are obligated to bring [the hostages] back alive and fast. We don’t want pictures of planes bringing caskets with Israeli flags. We want them here now — alive,” she said.

Lawmakers have [criticized](https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-must-improve-aid-to-victims-of-hamas-sexual-assault-knesset-panel-chief/) the government’s efforts to assist Israelis who were sexually assaulted on October 7.

At a hearing earlier this month, MK Pnina Tamano-Shata (Yesh Atid), chair of the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality, alleged that the various agencies handling the issue appeared to have failed to coordinate their efforts satisfactorily.

Calling the National Resilience Center’s hotline during that session, MK Merav Ben Ari (Yesh Atid) was kept waiting for 12 and a half minutes before a person on the other end hung up on her.

“Rape is murder of the soul, and no one is answering the call. Reach out to people who were harmed. You have to go to them and knock on their door at home. Or go to hospitals,” she declared then.