

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)  
220 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10017  
USA

November 23, 2023

Dear UN Women,

We, a collective group of legal professionals, write to you out of deep concern regarding your silence on the atrocities against Israeli women committed by Hamas during its attack on October 7th. Your silence has not gone unnoticed. It is so pronounced, it is deafening. It dismisses these heinous acts and, paradoxically, at the same time conveys their legitimacy.

UN Women is supposed to be the United Nations' entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A neutral global champion for women and girls. There are women and girls in Israel crying out for your help and advocacy. To them, your silence is devastating. To them, your silence declares that they are less than, undeserving of equal protection of the law or their human rights.

There is a body of UN resolutions and declarations regarding the need to eliminate violence against women. Indeed, resolution 1325 adopted by the Security Council on 31 October 2000 specifically "calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual *abuse*, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict." Resolution 1325 does not differentiate between women based on their nationality, background or political affiliation. All females are to be treated equally.

However, unlike previous instances this year, in which you rightly raised your voice against conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan and the Ukraine, presently, and despite the mounting evidence and testimonies, UN Women has actively chosen to remain silent. Mute on the horrific rapes and sexual abuse by Hamas against Israeli women and girls, the ongoing terrifying plight of the female hostages and the horrors they may be currently subject to.

But even worse than your silence is your partiality.

Your statement from October 13, 2023 stressed your concern for the humanitarian situation in Gaza and reiterated your enduring support of Palestinian women and children, since 1997.

Again, on November 20, 2023, UN Women spoke up for Palestinian women in "UN Women Rapid Assessment and Humanitarian Response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," a four-page report on the impact of this war (provoked by Hamas) on women in Gaza.

And once again, on November 22, in both the opening remarks by UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous at the official UN commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and in her briefing to the 9,484th meeting of the UN Security Council on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" Ms. Bahous focused her concern on women in Gaza.

Outrageously, on none of these occasions did UN Women or Ms. Bahous specifically and unambiguously address the crimes and atrocities committed by Hamas against Israeli and foreign women and girls, who were brutally attacked and sexually assaulted.

This sends a perilous signal and risks being interpreted as proof such crimes did not occur - because otherwise why did UN Women not report and condemn them? The alternative interpretation is possibly even worse - an endorsement by UN Women that sexual abuse is a

legitimate tool of war against Israeli women. That the UN-championed campaign #NoExcuse for violence against women, actually means no excuse unless the victim is Israeli.

The UN is tasked with protecting women, no matter their race, religion, nationality or political affiliation. By its silence UN Women is confessing that it has let politics dictate who it protects. It has abandoned hundreds of women and betrayed the universal application of women's rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

We urgently call upon UN Women to break its silence and condemn, unequivocally, the rape and gender-based crimes committed by Hamas.

We remind UN Women that Nov 25th, 2023 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. All women, including Israeli women. #NoExcuse means - No Excuse.

Sincerely,

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