



**Lemkin Institute**  
for Genocide Prevention  
and Human Security

## **The Genocidal Dimensions of Israel’s Use of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) against Palestinians**

*Released on 11 September 2024*

### Summary

- Based on reports from the United Nations, B’Tselem, Euro-Med Monitor, and other sources, Israel has used sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in a systematic manner against Palestinians in detention, at checkpoints, and during encounters in Gaza since 7 October 2023. The use of sexualized violence against Palestinians appears to have increased dramatically since 7 October.
- Statements by Israeli leaders, social media posts by IDF soldiers, and testimony from Palestinians who have experienced or witnessed sexualized violence, including released detainees, not only establish the widespread and systematized nature of sexualized violence but also document the broader *sexualization* of the conflict itself by the Israeli state and armed forces. This sexualization alone is indicative of genocidal violence, as it indicates a desire to destroy Palestinians as such by desecrating symbols of generation and undermining the ability of Palestinians to reproduce biologically and culturally.
- The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security has identified several specific patterns of sexualized violence that are indicative of a genocidal process. These include: The widespread use of sexualized violence against men and boys; life force atrocities (including ritualized humiliations); separation of families and other reproductive violence; and possible elitocide through the use of sexualized violence.
- The Lemkin Institute supports ongoing independent investigations of crimes committed by the Israel state and military and by Hamas, and underscores the importance of a trusted empirical narrative of crimes – especially of SGBV – to a lasting peace.

## *A Note on Terminology*

*In this statement, we use the term “sexualized violence” rather than the more common “sexual violence” because the former more clearly emphasizes that the violence being committed has been sexualized by perpetrator choice – it is violence with the aim of power, control, and destruction to which perpetrators have added acts with sexual symbolism. In other words, the term sexualized violence makes clear that the violence is not caused by sexual desire or desire for intimacy.*

## *Introduction*

On June 10 of this year, the *Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel* published a detailed report (referred to as the “10 June UN report” throughout this statement) on Israel’s military operations and attacks between 7 October 2023 and 31 December 2023. The Commission drew on testimonies from survivors and witnesses, verified digital content, and information from representatives of women’s rights organizations. The report found widespread evidence of sexualized violence that “... amount[ed] to the war crimes of sexual violence, outrages on personal dignity and sexual and gender-based violence amounting to torture and inhumane and cruel treatment.”

The 10 June UN report followed a statement published on 19 February 2024 by the Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations outlining “credible allegations of egregious human rights violations” against Palestinian women and girls. The statement was developed by expert members of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, which included Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967; and Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Chair), Claudia Flores, Ivana Krstić, Haina Lu, and Laura Nyirinkindi of the Working group on discrimination against women and girls. The experts’ findings include “arbitrary execution, deliberate targeting of women and children seeking refuge or fleeing, arbitrary detention, inhumane and degrading treatment, disappearances, and sexual assault.” The statement concluded that these crimes “may constitute grave violations under human rights and humanitarian law, and amount to serious crimes under international criminal law.”

This statement focuses on sexualized and gender-based violence against Palestinians, including men, women, boys, and girls. The UN Commission’s June 10 report points to “a large increase [our emphasis] in the range, frequency and severity of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by ISF against Palestinians since 7 October 2023,” recognizing the widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against Palestinians before 7 October.

The UN report therefore treats testimonies, reports, and footage since 7 October not as an exception to the on-going conflict and occupation but rather as a core part of it.

A recent report by [B'Tselem](#), an Israeli human rights group, shows how the abuse of Palestinian detainees after 7 October is both a continuation of previous Israeli military practices in detention facilities and a *radicalization* of those practices. It described “the rushed transformation of more than a dozen Israeli prison facilities, military and civilian, into a network of camps dedicated to the abuse of inmates as a matter of policy.” In their estimation, the abuse of detainees is now “organized and systematic” within this camp network. Udi Ofer, a civil rights lawyer and currently chair of the International Advisory Council of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, [wrote](#) in *Forward* on 21 August 2024: “I have never seen so much evidence of such wide scale abuses of detainees under Israeli custody.” [Al Jazeera](#) has estimated that Israel has detained more than 7,350 Palestinians from the West Bank since October 7, with 3,050 being kept in administrative detention. This does not include the approximately [2,300 Palestinians](#) detained during ground operations in Gaza.

The evidence provided in the 19 February statement, the 10 June report, and the B'Tselem report offer important insights into how SGBV is being used in Israel's current genocide against Palestinians. The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security believes that many details of this documented SGBV are indicators of the crime of genocide. We condemn gender-based violence in any form and view it as a red flag for genocide in “peacetime” societies as well as during conflict.

### *Sexualized Violence During Genocide*

Sexual violence during genocide is an important example of the broader gender-based strategies of identity destruction that are instrumentalized by perpetrators as a means of destroying a group, which we have outlined in our [Ten Patterns of Genocide](#) document. Sexualized violence is very common during genocide because it is an effective tactic for the destruction of identity groups. It tends to be highly symbolic, expressing genocidal intent through performance.

Importantly SGBV is never a military necessity, so it must be explained with reference to perpetrator motives and intent. Because of this special status, when sexualized violence is common during a conflict, it is always important to consider the possibility that it indicates deeper genocidal processes and/or genocidal aims among those committing and supporting the sexualized violence. Patterns of sexualized violence can tell us a great deal about perpetrator states-of-mind and can communicate intent more clearly than other forms of violence.

In many cases of genocide, perpetrators appear to use SGBV as an alternative to killing. During the Rwandan genocide, for example, Tutsi women who begged to be killed along with

their relatives and neighbors rather than subjected to sexualized violence were refused by the perpetrators and told that they will “die of sadness.” Survivors of SGBV during genocide often describe it as a “fate worse than death,” particularly when they are the sole survivors from a family or community. At the Lemkin Institute, we believe that sexualized violence is so harmful that it could theoretically enable the commission of genocide without any direct killing at all.

There are many reasons for the extremity of the harm committed through sexualized violence, key among them being the intimacy of sexualized violence, which causes deep spiritual harm to individuals and the group, inhibiting the communal trust necessary for cultural reproduction. Social mores related to sexual purity and modesty can reinforce the harm of sexualized violence during conflict. Also important is the physical harm that results from sexualized violence, which often prevents biological reproduction. The physical, mental, and spiritual effects of SGBV can negatively affect the group for generations.

Beyond the immediate victims, SGBV causes circles of suffering that rend family and community bonds and create new forms of conflict and trauma, such as when a community is faced with a large population of children fathered by the perpetrators of genocide. Furthermore, SGBV, as part of the desecration that is a core feature of genocide, can rupture peoples’ emotional ties to personal and collective memory and therefore to culture, creating tension and pain within an identity where there was once meaning and joy. Targeted societies are often unable to address the complex damage done to individuals, to families, and to identities by SGBV, due to lack of support, lack of resources, and taboos surrounding public discussions of sex, which inadvertently allows the destructive process of the genocide to continue even after perpetrators have been defeated.

During conflict, there are many ways in which SGBV can express the intent to commit genocide. For example, perpetrators often insult targets of sexualized violence during violation with epithets based on the target’s identity. Perpetrators often also express or otherwise demonstrate the instrumentalization of sexualized violence to inflict “serious bodily and mental harm” (Genocide Convention, II.b), which imposes “on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” (Genocide Convention II.c) and which therefore is “intended to prevent births within the group.”(Genocide Convention, II.d) Historical examples of the use of SGBV during genocide include the widespread rape of Native American women during military campaigns, the widespread use of sexualized violence at Boarding Schools for indigenous children in former British colonies, Germany’s creation of ‘rape camps’ during the Herero-Nama genocide, sexualized torture, rape, sexual enslavement, and forced deportation of Armenian women and girls during the Armenian Genocide, sexualized humiliation of Jews in front of family and community members at all stages of the Holocaust, mass rape and forced maternity camps during the Bangladesh and Bosnian Genocides, rape as a method of killing during the 1994 Genocide of the Tutsis of Rwanda, mass rape of women and girls as well as the forced disappearance of adolescent girls and boys during the Darfur genocide, and mass rape and sexual slavery of Yezidi women during the ongoing Yezidi genocide in Iraq and

Syria. In some of these cases, such as in the Armenian, Yazidi, and current Ukrainian genocides, children have also been transferred to the perpetrator group.(Genocide Convention, II.e)

Life force atrocities — common ritualized acts of cruelty during genocidal processes — are some of the most clear indicators of genocidal intent among perpetrators at some level of the hierarchy of violence because they follow scripts that betray an intentional targeting of cultural and biological reproduction. They communicate to victims and witnesses a desire to annihilate the ‘life force’ – the source of existence and historical agency – of the group. Life force atrocities often involve sexualized violence because they instrumentalize desecration, inversion, and humiliation to destroy an identity, preying on symbols of cultural and physical regeneration. Perpetrators of life force atrocities are themselves embodying the genocidal logic of a conflict, even if they are not acting in accordance with specific orders. When instrumentalized by a state or armed force within a larger plan, life force atrocities can be a strategy to undermine group cohesion in a way that would be impossible to achieve through simple mass murder.

Life force atrocities and SGBV can be very useful weapons, for example, when large-scale mass murder is not an option for the perpetrators, as when fighting forces are low on ammunition or are seeking to avoid the international censure that can come after a massacre. Furthermore, the desecration and humiliation that is at the heart of much SGBV allows perpetrations to target the group identity even when they prey on their victims individually, such as in conditions of detention. Detainees often become “stand-ins” for the group as a whole, and their abuse becomes a microcosm of genocide.

### *The Wider Context*

For Israelis, one of the most traumatic aspects of the 7 October 2023 attacks on southern Israel – when Palestinian militant groups killed hundreds of Israelis, including hundreds of young people at a concert, and took another 251 hostage – were the stories of sexualized violence against Israelis. Statements by Israeli officials after 7 October have both set the stage for an intensification of sexualized violence against Palestinians and demonstrated the highly gendered nature of this ongoing genocide. According to the 10 June UN report, Israeli officials have framed Hamas as a specifically sexualized threat, referring to the group as “a rapist regime.” Defining an adversary in terms related to sexualized violation is common within genocidal thinking and can act as a proactive justification of genocide as well as of genocidal forms of SGBV. One can see the sexualization of the ‘enemy’ threat in the genocidal ideologies targeting Tutsis in Rwanda, Bosniaks in the former Yugoslavia, Jews in Nazi Germany, the Herero people in the German colony of Southwest Africa (Namibia), Native Americans, and American Blacks.

Furthermore, in the months directly following 7 October, Israeli officials, rescue organizations, women's organizations, and ordinary citizens claimed that Hamas *instrumentalized* sexualized violence against Israeli and Jewish women during the 7 October attack, using it in a systematized and genocidal manner to target the Jewish and Israeli people as such. Although the truth of the claim of instrumentalization and systematization of sexualized violence by Hamas cannot be determined from the evidence at this point, it is believed by most Israelis and has been used by supporters of Israel globally to justify Israel's actions since 7 October, including SGBV against Palestinians. The Lemkin Institute has analyzed the genocidal aspects of Hamas's attack in its statement from 13 October 2024, "Active Genocide Alert - Israel-Palestine: There is No Justification for Genocide."

The genocidal sexualization of this conflict is very clear in the evidence that is emerging from detention facilities – or camps – since 7 October. The most illustrative example of this is the apparent practice by the Israeli military of utilizing the tortured bodies of Palestinian men and boys to perform genocidal power rituals for the consumption of Israeli civilians. According to the testimony of released detainees, Israeli civilians have been brought in small groups into the camps to watch torture sessions against Palestinian men and record these sessions on their phones. One former detainee told Euro-Med Monitor: "The Israeli army brought a number of Israeli civilians into our detention centres while beating us and telling them, 'These are Hamas terrorists who killed you and raped your women on 7 October,' while the Israeli civilians were filming us being beaten, abused, and tortured while making fun of us." Another former detainee reported being tortured while his IDF (Israel Defense Force) torturer was on the phone with his girlfriend, who was encouraged to insult the detainee during the session. It is important to note that the Palestinian men being tortured and mocked were fully or partially nude, a humiliating condition forced upon them for much of their detention and most of the torture sessions.

The vast majority of Palestinians in Israeli detention since 7 October have not been charged with any crime, much less convicted of 'killing and raping' Israelis. Certainly the Palestinians who have been released from detention were not charged or convicted, and yet they are the ones reporting that they were viewed, filmed, and mocked by Israeli civilians under the watch of the IDF (Israel Defence Forces).

Apart from the public performance of ritual sexualized violence, Israelis have also used highly sexualized language during performances of power. Ibrahim Salem, a 36-year-old father who was detained by Israel for eight months and recently released, reported that from the moment of arrest, Palestinian men were forced by Israeli soldiers to say "I am the son of a whore...my sister is a whore." IDF soldiers would also insult the detainees using sexually charged language, such as "we fucked the Nukhba [an elite unit in Hamas' military wing]" and "we fucked your mother." A form of torture witnessed by Salem more than once involved detainees being forced to stand on one leg for hours reciting "I am the son of a whore, I am the brother of a whore, Netanyahu fucked my sister, am Yisrael chai [the people of Israel live]."

Apart from rape accusations against Hamas, there are many factors contributing to the widespread and genocidal use of sexualized violence by Israeli forces after 7 October. The centrality of the military to Israeli society and the militarization of identity and daily life has reinforced patriarchal norms and violence within Israel, leading to high levels of misogyny and violence against Israeli women as well as a pronounced toxic masculinity within the Israel military, displayed by both male and female soldiers. The decades-long history of SGBV against Palestinians in detention has accustomed Israeli security personnel to this form of torture and normalized it within public discourse. Under these conditions, any radicalization of the conflict would predictably result in an intensification of sexualized violence. The 7 October attack itself was experienced by many Israelis as a violation of sacred space and a deep humiliation analogous to rape. Incidents of rape during the 7 October attack, which we outlined in our statement from February 10, 2024, only amplified the sense of violation of the Israeli national body.

In and of itself, a pervasive sense of national violation and humiliation, especially feelings of emasculation, can be a driver of genocidal ideation and perpetration. In a colonial context, where insurrectionist violence is committed by a racialized Other against people who are accustomed to the protection of superior military force, such attacks often precipitate a genocidal reaction from the settler group. Moments when threatened elites perceive a ‘reverse colonization’ are often met with genocidal thinking and genocidal violence, thus creating an environment particularly ripe for large-scale participation in genocide. Finally, regimes that routinely use sexualized violence to humiliate and intimidate colonized or otherwise unwanted peoples, as Israel has done, project their behavior and their state-of-mind onto their perceived enemy, accusing them of harboring the same tendencies and aiming for the same harm.

The 10 June UN report noted that “[a]ccording to some experts, allegations of sexual violence on 7 October 2023 have resulted in a sense of emasculation among Israeli men on a national scale, which has supported attempts to rebuild Israeli national masculinity through aggression. Accordingly, Israeli soldiers’ aggression and violence increasingly display sexual connotations intended to ‘feminize’ or shame, such acts having a clear link with entrenched gender stereotypes associated with masculinity and militarization. This aggression has taken the form of sexual violence intended to degrade and humiliate Palestinians...”

We would further add that efforts to shame and humiliate a nation through the bodies of its individual members are genocidal acts.

Just as the Lemkin Institute condemned sexualized violence against Israelis on 7 October, we condemn the SGBV being perpetrated by the Israeli state against Palestinians during the current genocide and the institutionalization of SGBV within its settler colonial occupation of the Palestinian territories. Much of this violence indicates the presence of genocidal intent within the forces and leadership committing it.

## *Bringing Nuance to the Singular Narrative of Victimhood*

Within conflict zones, sexualized violence is often discussed as a crime faced only by women and girls, ignoring the vulnerability of men and boys, especially in genocidal contexts where incidents of SGBV against men and boys seem to increase in number. In focusing on women and girls, narratives of conflict-related sexualized violence often reduce the story to a singular form of victimhood and deprive survivors of their right to exercise ownership of their experiences and to tell their stories in an authoritative voice. Furthermore, SGBV is still often discussed – in the news, for example – in voyeuristic ways that can provoke shame among the victims, when the shame should, of course, be directed towards the perpetrators. The Lemkin Institute views SGBV as a particularly pernicious and effective tool in genocide – sometimes ordered by state or military authorities, sometimes innovated by soldiers and other armed persons – and we aim throughout this report to emphasize the social shame that it brings to perpetrators and perpetrator states or armed groups.

In this statement we also seek to reaffirm Palestinian women’s agency under occupation and genocide and recognize the vulnerability of men and boys to gender-based violence, including sexualized violence. We acknowledge that our analysis is framed within a gender binary, focusing on the experience of men/boys on the one hand and women/girls on the other. Therefore, the analysis fails to capture the full experience of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly persons on the gender spectrum. It is not our intention to overlook or disregard these experiences; however, due to the limited information available on this topic in Gaza our research and scope is constrained.

While it is without question that Palestinian women have experienced sexualized violence, and that sexualized violence towards them has been deployed as a tactic of war, occupation, and settler colonialism, Palestinian women and girls are not without agency in combating these threats. Detained women, for example, many of whom experience sexual violence as part of detention, exercise agency through acts of resistance, such as hunger strikes and other forms of civil disobedience. These acts of resistance are part of an established methodology of resistance that, for decades, has been used by Palestinians against an unjust system that detains them indefinitely without trial.

Since 7 October, Palestinian women in Gaza have been using resources they have developed over years of blockade and bombings to help their communities survive. In the context of such a comprehensive military campaign, they have by necessity taken on jobs that push back against the extinction of their families, communities, and identity. For example, within the context of daily massacres, displacement, meager medical and food supplies, and mass detention, women have stood up to address the urgent needs of their communities. They have sewn diapers to address the shortage of baby supplies. They have earned money as the heads of households when husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons have been killed, maimed, or detained. Women have also served as human rights defenders. Brave journalists Pleastia Alaqad, Hind Khoudary, and Bisan Owda have documented firsthand the reality of the



genocide on the ground. Palestinian women take care of children, including those orphaned by the genocide, provide nourishment for families and communities, sustain community networks through, for example, supporting children's education, and organize much of the emotional work of the community.

Just as Palestinian women and girls in Gaza have shown agency in excess of common gender stereotypes during this genocide, so too have men and boys. As noted by Al Jazeera journalist Sana Saeed, the world has been deeply moved by the heroic daily efforts of men and boys to rescue trapped family members and neighbors from the rubble after air attacks and shelling as well as by the gentleness of their care for children, family members, and other vulnerable people, all of which has been caught on video and shared via social media. Palestinian men and boys, who have been criminalized in Israeli political and social discourse and stereotyped as hyper-masculinist tyrants by Western Islamophobic tropes, have demonstrated remarkable strength and resilience in meeting the challenges of genocide, including undertaking the emotional labor of nurturing.

A standout feature of the genocide in Gaza is the extent to which men and boys have been targeted with SGBV – while in detention but also during Israel's ground operations. One former detainee told Middle East Eye that “Most of the prisoners will come out with rectum injuries [caused by the sexual assault].” The June 10th report outlines the widespread sexualized targeting of men, amounting to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. These patterns are especially grievous given that many of the men and boys were subjected to being filmed or photographed while being sexually harassed or humiliated. In and of itself, this is suggestive of genocide, since rates of sexualized violence against men and boys increase dramatically during genocidal processes.

The ramifications of sexualized violence are catastrophic both for individuals and for communities, regardless of the gender of the victim. Studies have shown that men who have been raped during conflict are treated afterwards in ways similar to women survivors – they have been mocked in public, shunned by family, and ostracized from the community. They also suffer some similar physical sequelae. Beyond these overall commonalities, however, the impact of widespread sexualized violence on a community must also be understood in a gender-sensitive way and within prevalent individual and collective conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity. Almost all victims of sexualized violence experience some form of self-blame and fear of social stigmatization, but the way in which these are felt and expressed differs for men, women, boys, and girls due to prevalent beliefs about gender roles.

Women and girls often feel ‘dirty’ and ‘ruined,’ especially in societies where female sexuality is closely controlled, and have to fear and contend with unwanted pregnancy. Men and boys, on the other hand, often suffer from the “perceived ... clash between gender expectations and their experience of SV,” and can be even more reluctant than women and girls to seek medical and psychosocial help. As with women, sexualized violence is often experienced by men as a permanent loss in status with implications catastrophic to their self-worth. Frequently the male survivor's sense of subordination can be felt as being rendered ‘less of a

man,’ or a ‘de facto female,’ a feeling that is unintentionally reaffirmed by health services that are built around caring for female survivors of these crimes. Men and boys who have survived sexualized violence need services tailored to their specific experiences and that offer them a feeling of safety and dignity. Unfortunately, services for survivors of sexualized violence, including during war and mass atrocity, are still often geared towards women and girls (when they are available at all).

In the case of both female and male victims, the physical, psychological, and social consequences of SGBV are often severe and can follow the survivor throughout his or her life. The destructive impact on the community of widespread and systematic sexualized violence is immense.

As survivors of the widespread use of SGBV by Israeli forces before and after 7 October 2023, Palestinian women, men, and children, should not be unfairly and inaccurately labeled as mere victims. Instead, their experiences highlight the resilience of the Palestinian people, who have worked together to ensure the survival and continuation of their community in the midst of global hostility to their very existence. As we shed light on the lived realities of sexualized violence against Palestinians, we place blame on the Israeli state, on individual perpetrators, and on complicit nations that should know better.

### *Sexual Harassment and Humiliation in Detention and During Ground Operations*

SGBV can occur in ‘peacetime’ and in conflict. Conflict-related sexualized violence (CRSV) is closely linked to ‘peacetime’ sexualized violence but has additional features and legal mechanisms associated with it. In particular, unlike SGBV during peacetime, many CRSV crimes can be punished as a violation of the laws of war; they are often instrumentalized by a belligerent to aid in the war effort. The United Nations defines conflict-related sexualized violence as “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.”

In Israel-Palestine today, forms of SGBV that were characteristic of occupation and forced displacement are overlapping with CRSV related directly to the Israeli response to the Hamas attack on 7 October. As we will discuss in this statement, the routine sexualized harassment and humiliation of detainees has increased and spread to interactions between IDF soldiers and Palestinians during ground operations in Gaza and the West Bank. Furthermore, the use of rape and sexual assault against men and boys appears to have increased. An increase in rape of men and boys in any conflict is a red flag for the presence of a genocidal process.

Sexualized harassment and humiliation are two very common forms of SGBV during conflict. They include strip searches, forced nudity, and coercive touching of private areas of the body. Such violence against men during conflict, particularly prisoners of war, has historically been treated as so commonplace that it was excluded from analyses of SGBV during war and genocide. The assumption in the literature seemed to be that men would not experience the same shame and sense of violation as women when forced to undress or when being touched in their private areas. Of course, strip searches, forced nudity, and coercive touching of private areas of the body should always be considered to be a form of SGBV, irrespective of the gender of the targeted persons.

In Gaza, the evidence suggests that the Israeli military has instrumentalized sexual harassment and humiliation against men and boys as well as against women and girls, in detention as well as during ground operations. [Since 7 October 2023](#), Israel has arbitrarily detained an unknown number of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including thousands of civilian men and boys, hundreds of civilian Palestinian women and girls, human rights defenders, doctors, journalists, and humanitarian workers. Lawyer and human rights defender Sahar Francis has [pointed out](#) that “Israel’s mass incarceration of Palestinians should be viewed as part of a broader strategy to colonize, dispossess, expel, and suppress indigenous Palestinians.” This “[carceral regime](#)” – created to control Palestinians – has been in place since 1967. In the decades since then, Israel has detained approximately one million Palestinians. An April 2023 UN [report](#) has called Israel’s detention system “a tool for eroding Palestinian national identity and consolidating Israeli colonialism.”

Many Palestinians who have been released from detention by the IDF since 7 October have shared their experiences of sexualized violence. Their experiences, which the 10 June UN Report [calls](#) “torture, cruel or inhuman treatment and outrages upon personal dignity,” have been documented by numerous credible sources, including the aforementioned reports by the UN, [Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor](#), [The International Secretariat of The World Organization Against Torture](#), [OMCT](#), and the [United Nations Relief and Works Agency \(UNWRA\)](#). Notably, the documentation of strip searches and forced nudity challenges binary understandings of gender roles and misconceptions that men are the sole perpetrators of sexualized violence. Both male and female IDF soldiers have been perpetrators.

### *Women and Girls*

Historically SGBV against women and girls has been a systemic feature of the Israeli detention system. In 2002 *The World Organization Against Torture* called for an urgent intervention in light of the [sexual harassment of Palestinian female political prisoners](#) in the Neve Tertzze women’s prison by Israeli guards. In 2018, Gaby Lasky, the lawyer of Palestinian activist Ahed al-Tamimi, filed a [complaint](#) that the Israeli interrogator sexually harassed the minor, which was caught on video. In 2019, a [statement](#) to the UN jointly written by international NGOs outlined the sexual abuse of Palestinian women in detention by Israeli

authorities. In July of 2023, Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, documented routine “invasive strip searches, sexual abuse, and threats” against female prisoners during detention and interrogations.

The 10 June UN report, 19 February UN statement, and 2024 UNRWA report document that Palestinian women in detention have been forced to publicly strip down to their underwear and have been subjected to strip searches and inappropriate touching. All three reports find that Israeli soldiers have photographed and filmed Palestinian detainees in degrading and humiliating circumstances and while naked, often uploading these videos online.

Amena Hussain, a Gazan mother of two children (whose name has been changed to protect her identity), is among the hundreds of Palestinian civilians who have been arbitrarily detained since 7 October. In an interview with the Middle East Eye, Hussain shares many experiences of suffering since the start of the genocide, including bombings, forced displacement, separation from her children, arbitrary detention, and sexual violence.

Hussain was detained for unknown reasons while finding refuge with her two children in a Gaza school. Although her children were not accompanied by any other family member, the Israeli authorities separated her from them and left them behind amongst other displaced people. While detained, Hussain endured constant strip searches, which were carried out by both male and female soldiers. She was kept in a small cage, deprived of food and medicine, beaten with a baton, spat on, stripped down to her underwear, and molested by officers who reached into her pants and into her shirt to touch her breasts. She states, “they were abusing me by all means.” The violence did not end upon being released from the detention facility; during her release, Hussain was taken to another room where she was placed with a group of nude Palestinian women who had been forced to undress. She was told to do the same. Later, the group of women were allowed to get dressed and were bussed to the Karem Abu Salem (Karem Shalom) crossing and told to run. Most of Hussain’s belongings, including \$1,000 in cash, were never returned.

In another case, reported by Palestinian Journalist Bisan Owda on 30 May 30 2024, a young woman experienced sexual assault while being transferred between prisons. During her transfer with two other women, she was handcuffed with zip ties and blindfolded. Because the blindfold was not entirely covering her sight, she could see the two other women being touched on their faces and lips by a male IDF soldier. Then IDF soldiers began to sexually assault Owda herself by touching her face, neck, and chest.

Beyond the walls of detention centers, as laid out by the 10 June UN report, witnesses and human rights defenders have documented forced stripping and invasive searches of women and men during evacuations and ground operations in the Gaza strip by IDF soldiers. The report documents, for example, IDF soldiers forcing women to remove their clothes and their veils, breaking strict religious and cultural dress codes. If a woman refused to remove her veil, she faced harassment and beatings.

This stripping, often followed by continued sexual harassment and physical and verbal abuse by soldiers, was frequently carried out publicly, specifically in front of family and community members. For example, this was the case in Salah al-Din Street during evacuations, when several women and a girl were forced to undress to their underwear and their male relatives and community members were “mocked and harassed” for failing to intervene and protect them. Evidently, this sexualized violence was perpetrated against women to humiliate them, but it was also used “to degrade, humiliate and punish the community as a whole” by shaming men for being unable to exercise their traditional responsibilities. As the 10 June UN report concludes, this humiliating and degrading treatment is “intended to perpetuate Palestinian subordination in relation to the Israeli occupation.”

Sexual humiliation and harassment towards Palestinian women and girls is not confined to the Gaza strip but extends into the West Bank – specifically at militarized checkpoints. According to testimonies published by Haaretz, an anonymous Palestinian woman was sexually harassed at the Tamar checkpoint in Tel Rumeida, Hebron on 17 August 2024. Recounting it as a traumatic experience, she explained: “After taking down part of his trousers, the soldier asked her: ‘Do you want it? Come and see.’” According to local women from Tel Rumeida, her experience at the checkpoint is part of “... a general atmosphere that allows for the harassment and humiliation of women crossing the checkpoints.” The sexualized violence she experienced is also a part of the recent escalation of sexual harassment, humiliation, and verbal abuse at military checkpoints across Palestine.

The forced stripping of women and mocking of men who are forced to watch is also a life force atrocity and hence highly suggestive of genocidal violence. The ultimate aim of the incident on Salah Al-Din Street was clearly to desecrate and destroy family and community bonds by targeting and inverting traditional relations of responsibility among members of families and communities. The harm caused by symbolic violence like this is very potent and extends well beyond the individuals involved. It is found in different forms in all genocidal processes.

Israeli troops have routinely marshalled generative symbols of Palestinian life as part of their genocide. This includes the destruction of important cultural objects, like universities, libraries, schools, mosques, and cemeteries. Related specifically to sexualized violence, in the past several months IDF soldiers who have invaded and raided homes throughout Gaza have also documented themselves posing with the undergarments of Palestinian women who were forced to evacuate their homes and who have been killed, displaced or detained. Videos of soldiers posing with the undergarments have circulated across the internet. According to Reuters, “One photo [amongst many] shows a soldier posing with his gun, making a thumbs-up gesture, in front of a double bed strewn with packets of women's underwear.” Israeli soldiers can be seen wearing underwear and dresses looted from homes belonging to displaced or killed Palestinian women in Khan Yunis, Rafa, and another unidentified house in Gaza. These ritualized desecrations of women, of generative symbols, and of intimate spaces are highly genocidal.

Reem Alsalem, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, interpreted the videos and photos in the following way: “[IDF soldiers] are treating it like a sort of war trophy ... mocking and trying to humiliate Palestinian women through exposing and parading their most intimate objects.” The videos demonstrate the profound sexualization of violence against Palestinians in this genocide.

### *Men and Boys*

Palestinian men in custody of the IDF (many of whom have been identified by community members as civilians, including doctors and journalists, through the videos circulating the internet) have been subjected to similar public humiliation and degrading treatment by IDF soldiers as they carry out ground operations in densely-populated communities. Palestinian men who have been stripped of their clothing have been photographed and filmed in degrading circumstances. The 10 June UN report documented nine incidents where hundreds of men and boys were photographed and/or filmed completely or partially nude by Israeli soldiers and circulated online.

Numerous media platforms have covered this, including The Times of Israel, Al Jazeera, BBC, and CNN. Using photographic and video evidence, these news outlets have documented at least 100 Palestinian men lined up, blindfolded, and stripped down to their underwear. In another instance, CNN has reported on at least two children being stripped and detained alongside men in a northern Gaza stadium.

These recent incidents of sexual humiliation are part of a broader historical pattern of sexualized violence against Palestinian men, but they also demonstrate a remarkable escalation in incidence and intensity. Palestinian men and boys have been subjected to sexualized violence long before 7 October 2023. The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) conducted a study of the conditions of detention in Israeli facilities between the period of 2005-2015. The final report outlines three main forms of sexual torture and ill-treatment inflicted on Palestinian men, including verbal sexual harassment, forced nudity, and physical sexual assault. The study, which collected thousands of testimonies, identified 36 allegations of verbal sexual harassment, threats of rape, sexual humiliation, sexualized threats towards family members and 35 reports of forced nudity.

Historically, in occupied East Jerusalem, for example, the IDF routinely stripped men and took them to unknown locations. During this genocide, the use of sexualized violence against Palestinian men and boys has escalated and appears to be used in a systematic way, as documented by the 10 June UN report. Specifically, men have been forced to publicly strip while “blindfolded, tied to a chair, kneeling and/or with their hands tied behind their back” and endure interrogations while undressed or wearing only diapers. During the current genocide, such as during ground operations in the Gaza strip and the West Bank, Palestinian

men have been subjected to “... forced public nudity, forced stripping, and sexual humiliation, harassment, and abuse.”

The Israeli state was detaining nearly 7,000 men and boys before the major Hamas attack on southern Israel. This number increased significantly after October 7. Importantly, both before and after 7 October, many of these men and boys have never been convicted of a crime, including the more than 2,000 who are being held without charge or trial as of June 2024, in a process known as “administrative detention.” Of those who have been convicted of a crime, “[t]he main alleged crime for these detentions is stone throwing, which can carry a 20-year sentence in prison for Palestinian children.”

The 2024 UNRWA Report documented at least one case where men sheltering in an UNRWA installation were forced by the IDF to strip naked and continued to be detained nude. Moreover, at makeshift checkpoints, when women were made to undress to their undergarments, men were stripped completely naked. For example, during a ground evacuation in early November 2023 on Salah al-Din Street, a victim described being subjected to forced public nudity alongside his family members and other displaced persons. Forcing men to walk between checkpoints in the nude demonstrates an intention to emasculate, subordinate, and humiliate.

Arbitrarily detained Palestinian children also endure strip searches by Israeli guards and officials. According to UNRWA, “in most reported detention incidents, the IDF forced males, including children, to strip down to their underwear.” As outlined in the 10 June UN report, at both Al-Shifa and Nasser hospitals, all teenage boys were told to publicly undress to their undergarments. The report continues that a female IDF soldier “ordered two teenage boys who had been stripped to their underwear to dance and recorded a video of them while she was laughing.” Such SGBV against children appears to be an ongoing trend. In a July 2023 report, Save the Children found that 69 percent of child detainees have been strip searched.

Moreover, according to Save the Children, “[s]ome [children] report violence of a sexual nature, including being hit or touched on the genitals.” Notably, as Israel is a state party to the legally-binding *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, this conduct is clearly in flagrant violation of its responsibility to ensure that “no child [is] subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,” as outlined under *Article 37* of the Convention.

## *Sexual Assault and Rape in Detention and During Ground Operations*

Sexual assault and rape are some of the most serious forms of sexualized violence inflicted on Palestinians by Israeli military personnel, often resulting in permanent physical damage and even death. The Israeli military appears to be using rape as a routine form of torture at the the army base in southern Occupied Palestine, Sde Teiman, which human rights activists have referred to as “The Israeli Guantánamo” and which a lawyer who managed to access the camp has called “more horrific than Abu Ghraib.”

Almost all of the thousands of male detainees taken from Gaza since 7 October have been through Sde Teiman at some point during their detention, usually for interrogation. They are not charged, have not been informed of the reasons for their detention, and generally are not granted access to lawyers or the Red Cross. A *New York Times* report, “Inside the Base Where Israel has Detained Thousands of Gazans,” uncovered inhumane conditions, frequent beatings resulting in broken bones, and rampant torture. The report drew on three months of interviews conducted by Patrick Kingsley of Israel and Bilal Shbair of Gaza, who visited the site and observed the conditions while also gathering the testimony from Palestinian detainees as well as from anonymous Israeli military commanders, doctors, and soldiers working at Sde Teiman. According to its findings, at least 35 of the estimated 4000 detainees since 7 October have died under unknown circumstances.

### *Women and Girls*

The 19 February UN statement documents two female Palestinian detainees who have reported rape during detention, and many others have reported threats of rape. These allegations of rape are corroborated by Canadian physicians on the ground at the Al-Khayr hospital in Gaza. One paramedic recounted that “a woman was raped for two days until she lost their ability to speak.” These instances of rape are not exceptional but, as Palestinian feminists Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Sarah Ihmoud, and Suhad Dahir-Nashif explain, “[r]ape and other forms of sexual violence against Palestinian women have always been an element of the settler colonial state’s attempts to destroy and eliminate indigenous Palestinians from their land.”

For example, rape of women and girls was a central part of massacres and evictions during the Nakba in 1948, where it was “...used to coerce Palestinians into abandoning their lands.” In this case as in others rape was used as a tactic to dispossess and displace people from their land. While a full account of sexualized violence during the Nakba is limited due to tradition, shame, dislocation, and trauma, there are some eyewitness accounts from survivors as well as reports made by international organizations. For example, the Red Cross reported the rape of a girl soon after the takeover of Jaffa. Weeks before the establishment of Israel, Irgun and Stern Gang Zionist militias attacked Deir Yassin village, killing 107 Palestinians; many women were raped before being killed. In the case of the Tantura massacre of 1948, rape



victims were treated in a hospital in nearby Nablus. During an attack on the village of Sa'sa, oral testimonies reveal that four women and one girl were raped in front of their community.

### *Men and Boys*

The *New York Times* report uncovered multiple instances of rape of male detainees, perpetrated by both male and female Israeli security personnel, although the *Times* fails to identify the torture described in the report as “rape.” In one instance, the *Times* recounts the story of a female Israeli officer who ordered two soldiers to lift up a 39-year-old Palestinian senior nurse, Mr. al-Hamlawi, “and press... his rectum against a metal stick that was fixed to the ground.” Al-Hamlawi explained that “the stick penetrated his rectum for roughly five seconds, causing it to bleed and leaving him with ‘unbearable pain.’”

The same form of sexual assault has been independently documented by an UNRWA report based on interviews of released detainees from Israeli detention facilities, including Sde Teiman. The UNRWA report cited a 41-year-old detainee who said that interrogators “made me sit on something like a hot metal stick and it felt like fire” and also said that another detainee “died after they put the electric stick up” his anus. On June 20, 2024, Al Jazeera reported that 42-year-old detained Palestinian journalist Mohammed Arab along with other detainees endured “multiple instances of torture, abuse, and rape.” Palestinian lawyer Khaled Mahajneh, who was able to gain access to detained journalist Muhammad Arab, reports that Arab witnessed “Israeli guards sexually assault[ing] six prisoners with a stick in front of the other detainees after they had violated prison orders.”

Middle East Eye reports that one detainee at Sde Teiman was raped by a female IDF soldier by being forced to bend over a desk with his hands in front of him. While male detainees held him down and watched, the female soldier “would insert her fingers and other objects into his rectum. When he reacted or moved back, the soldier standing in front of him would hit him in the head and force him to bend again.”

A historical perspective reveals that these recent cases of sexual assault against men during interrogations are an escalation of a pre-existing trend. Rape was instrumentalized by the IDF during the first Intifada, when Israeli soldiers used it to “coerce information and discourage resistance efforts,” according to the *Georgetown Security Studies Review*. For example, in January 2021, according to Defence for Children International-Palestine (DCIP), an Israeli interrogator allegedly physically and sexually assaulted a 15-year-old Palestinian boy at a Jerusalem detention facility. According to documents obtained by DCIP, the investigator “knocked [the boy] to the floor while blindfolded and raped him with an object.” In an effort to force a confession, the investigator continued to threaten the boy with sexualized violence, such as “[inflicting] extreme pain on his genitals.”

Since July 2024, the Israeli military and political establishment has been wracked by allegations of the horrific gang rape of one Palestinian man by nine Israeli reservists, who

“was so badly brutalized in the course of being sodomized that he suffered a ruptured bowel, severe damage to his anus, broken ribs and lung damage.” Prof. Yoel Donchin, the doctor at Sde Teiman who treated the victim, was so shocked by the detainee’s condition that at first he did not believe the crime was committed by Israelis. He told Ha’aretz, “If the [Israeli] state and Knesset members think there's no limit to how much you can abuse prisoners, they should kill them themselves, like the Nazis did, or close the hospitals," adding, "[i]f they maintain a hospital only for the sake of defending ourselves at [the International Criminal Court at] the Hague, that's no good.”

While the Israel Defense Forces deny that “systematic abuse” has taken place at Sde Teiman, the population of the detention camp has since been reduced in light of recent allegations. Commanders confirmed to the *New York Times* that “at least 12 soldiers had been dismissed from their roles at the site, some of them for excessive use of force.”

The use of sexual assault and rape in Sde Teiman is indicative of the superfluous cruelty that is often the consequence of genocidal thinking. It is aimed to physically and psychologically destroy the targeted person as a representative of the group before sending them back into society. How this manifests in real time can be observed in the public testimony of Meir Ben-Shitrit, IDF soldier and the main suspect in the Sde Teiman gang rape case. Ben-Shitrit denies the allegations of rape. Instead, in an interview with Channel 14 TV, he boasted of the morality of the Israeli forces by comparing what he would like to do to Palestinians with what the IDF actually does: “We could have just cocked our weapons and killed them all on the floor, from the nature of things because you want to kill that person with a machete... I’m ready until my hand gets tired.”

In the same interviews, Channel 14 TV host Shai Goldshtein was quick to back up Ben-Shitrit with an equally genocidal statement:

“I put myself in your place, in your situation. You stand in front of these people, really, the most despicable people one can imagine, who did the most horrible things to our people, our brothers and sisters – I think that if I was there and I had the chance, I would go all out on these people.”

By denying responsibility for a well-documented rape, while professing a desire to commit mass murder, and simultaneously arguing that he is part of a moral army, Ben Shitrit suggests that the mistreatment of individual detainees is not only an alternative to mass murder of Palestinians but also a moral act of immense restraint and generosity.

It must be remembered that the vast majority of detainees in Sde Teiman are not militants or connected to Hamas or responsible for the 7 October attack. Many of them are professionals with high standing in Palestinian society as well as fathers or grandfathers. If these targets have been chosen intentionally, as the evidence appears to show, Israel’s torture system can be argued to be a form of elitocide via degradation and desecration.

Elitocide is a common crime during genocide. It allows perpetrators to target the leadership of the identity group, thus rendering the group's capacity for resistance and for cultural reproduction more difficult. Elitocide was committed by the Ottoman Empire against Armenians, by the Nazis against Jews and Poles, by the Soviet Union against Poles and Ukrainians, by the West Pakistani Army against Bengalis in East Pakistan (Bangladesh), and by the Khmer Rouge against the so-called "New People," to name a few instances. Gendercide against community men can be seen as a gendered form of elitocide that targets leaders within a patriarchy. Generally speaking, elitocide is accomplished by mass murder, but mass sexualized violence and degradation can have the same impact, especially from the perpetrator's point of view. Elitocide is also often a "harbinger" of more intensive mass murder to come.

Whatever the case, subjecting patriarchs in a patriarchal society to such humiliation in a routine fashion is indicative of a genocidal process. Similar to elitocide, the desecration of patriarchs is aimed to sever the "head" of the society, leaving the social body more vulnerable and without direction.

Evidence that Israel has systematized sexual humiliation of Palestinian men abounds. Director General of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, Dr. Muneer Al-Barash, reports that there are several allegations, made through sworn statements and by witnesses, that the IDF has used trained dogs to "carry out vile actions against detainees," including rape. At least one case of the use of dogs to rape Palestinian detainees has since been corroborated by the reputable Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. Fadi Said al-Din Bakr, a lawyer who was released after 45 days of detention on February 22, shared his eye-witness testimony:

"... The soldiers took off the blindfolds covering our eyes for the first time. The soldiers later pulled the young man sitting to my right, forced him to sleep on the ground, and tied his hands and feet. Suddenly, the occupation soldiers let loose trained police dogs on the young man, who was subjected to [rape]."

Bakr received threats from Israeli soldiers that he would also endure this form of sexualized violence.

The use of dogs to terrorize, control, and torture Palestinians is not new, nor is it confined to detention facilities. This past July, 24-year-old Mohammad Bhar, who had Down's Syndrome and was autistic, was mauled by an Israeli military dog and then left by Israeli soldiers to die in his empty family apartment. The use of dogs for rape has been reported in other mass atrocities, specifically during Pinochet's military dictatorship.

On 29 July 2024 the Israeli military charged at least nine reservists, including Ben-shitri (quoted above), for the abuse and torture, and specifically the sexual abuse, of Palestinian detainees in Sde Teiman. Reservists who have been taken into custody have been accused of gang raping and abusing the detainee to the point of paralysis and hospitalization. A video of the incident has been leaked that, according to Al-Jazeera and other analysts, offers concrete

evidence of the sexual assault. This marks the first time that Israel has charged soldiers for violence against Palestinian detainees. Notably, this move was made following immense pressure from the UN, media outlets, and human rights defenders. Since 29 July, however, this attempt at accountability has been hindered due to pressure from right-wing figures, including Israel's security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, and Israel's finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, resulting in drastically reduced sentences. Ben-Shitrit spoke of how his arrest was "a mere sham" because he was applauded by the Israeli military and released after only a few hours.

In response to the arrests, in acts of protest, dozens of Israeli settlers forcibly entered Beit Lid, a military base, and gathered outside of Sde Teiman. These protesters were not protesting the systemic torture and sexual assault of Palestinians, but instead were calling the rapists heroes, supporting the soldiers accused of abuse, and demanding their release. Moreover, in response to the reservists' arrests, Israel's Knesset ordered an emergency meeting where Palestinian lawmaker, Ahmad Tibi posed the question: "To insert a stick in a person's rectum, is that legitimate?" To which Israeli Knesset member, Hanoach Milwidsky, responds, "Yes, if he is Nukhba [Hamas], everything is legitimate." In this way Milwidsky justified and defended the rape of Palestinian men in detention.

Milwidsky's response during the emergency meeting and the protests that took place in support of the rapists speak to the systemic nature of sexualized violence against Palestinians. Not only are the individual perpetrators implicated, but also Israeli state officials and Israeli society, which has fostered a culture of impunity. Ben-Shitrit describes being met with "love" and "hugs" on the streets of Tel Aviv after going public with his identity. A recent poll has shown that a significant majority of Israelis (65 percent) believe that the soldiers should not face criminal penalties for the alleged rape.

### *Reproductive Violence*

Much of the sexualized violence detailed in this statement is also a form of reproductive violence. Reproductive violence includes "the lack of adequate maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services" as well as efforts to impair the biological and cultural reproductive capacity of the Palestinians of Gaza. Reproductive violence is multidimensional, involving attacks on individuals, infrastructure, relationships, and cultural norms, symbols, and traditions. During genocidal processes, reproductive violence is used as a form of 'totalizing violence' to ensure that an identity group is erased from a specific territory, either by mass murder, slow death by attrition, decreasing birth rates, or forced displacement.

Since 7 October, reproductive care for Palestinian women and girls in Gaza has been almost completely absent. Frequent evacuations and destruction of housing infrastructure has meant that women and girls generally live in tight congregated settings where they have no privacy.

Most women and girls of childbearing age are unable to obtain menstrual pads, causing much anxiety, shame, and embarrassment in Gaza's crowded camps, tents, and other living quarters. The absence of water and the scarcity of toilets means that women and girls are unable to clean themselves during menstruation, leading to infection and illness.

Beyond this, the way in which Israel has trapped the population of Gaza and targeted its critical civilian infrastructure has had a devastating impact on pregnant women and infants. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) has monitored the IDF's prevention of births in the Gaza Strip since 7 October. Approximately 50,000 pregnant women have been living in dire conditions due to Israel's targeting and destruction of vital services, such as the healthcare system, and its restrictions on access to humanitarian aid and adequate nutrition. With approximately 5,500 women giving birth every month, these violations of human rights and humanitarian law have resulted in miscarriages, preterm labor, stillbirths, and maternal deaths.

Many Palestinian women have been forced to undergo caesarian sections without anesthesia and in unhygienic conditions. Dozens of premature babies died at al-Nasr and al-Shifa hospitals due to Israeli military assaults and a lack of fuel and electricity to sustain incubators. Widespread hunger across Gaza has negatively affected the ability of mothers to produce milk. According to the International Crisis Group, an estimated 60,000 pregnant women were malnourished and dehydrated by April 2024 and many were severely anemic. Newborns in northern Gaza are dying of hunger. UNICEF estimates that 90 percent of children in Gaza lack the adequate nutrition for healthy development and that 31 percent of children under two suffer from acute malnutrition. According to experts, malnutrition in infancy and early childhood will have negative effects across generations.

The 10 June UN report has also pointed to the mistreatment and arrest of pregnant women, citing its occurrence in Salah al-Din Street witnessed by a female Palestinian who was soon after also arrested.

Moreover, the *Palestinian Centre for Human Rights* has claimed that "Israel's measures intended to prevent births within Gaza strip." Reem al-Salem, the *UN Special Rapporteur* on violence against women and girls, has warned that "the reproductive violence inflicted by Israel on Palestinian women, newborn babies, infants, and children could be qualified ... as acts of genocide under Article II of the Convention on the Prevention of Genocide..." The lack of protection for civilian infrastructure and the lives of civilian women can indicate that Israel perceives Palestinian women to be a security threat due to their biological reproductive capacity.

Genocidal forces within Israeli society have previously expressed hostility towards Palestinian women as child bearers. For example, during the fifty-one-day Israeli military assault on Gaza in 2014, Israeli soldiers "[printed] T-shirts that depicted a bullseye pointing at a pregnant Palestinian munaqqaba (a woman wearing a niqab) with the caption, '1 shot, 2 kills,' implying that the Israeli soldier can kill both the woman and her unborn child." During

the Nakba in 1948, one “witness said she saw her sister, who was nine months pregnant, being shot in the back of the neck. Her assailants then cut open her stomach with a butcher’s knife and extracted the unborn baby.” Evisceration of pregnant women is a very common life force atrocity during genocide.

More recently, in 2005, a Palestinian woman Samar Sbeih was arrested and detained while two months pregnant. Not only did the IDF force her to experience a cruel pregnancy and delivery process, but also, during her detention, she was threatened constantly with forced abortion. Under the legal definition of sexualized violence, forced abortion – as well as the threat of it – constitute sexual violence. This illustrates what Palestinian feminists Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Sarah Ihmoud, and Suhad Dahir-Nashif call a “machinery of violence [that] explicitly targets native women’s sexuality and bodily safety as biologized ‘internal enemies’ since they are the producers of the next generation.”

Finally, callous forced family separations have been committed in Gaza that fall under the rubric of reproductive violence, as they cause enormous harm to everyone involved, especially mothers and children. Palestinian mother Amena Hussain, whom we mentioned previously, recounted the constant fear she had for her children’s safety during her arbitrary detention: “I was worried sick about my children, wondering if they were safe, if they had food and water, if they were warm and had someone to care for them.” Many families have been separated during chaotic evacuations ordered by Israel, many children are now entirely alone, having been orphaned or separated from their parents and other caregivers, and many families have been forcibly separated during Israel’s apparently random arrests of civilians.

Moreover, the Israeli military has abducted an unknown number of children and taken them outside of Gaza, according to Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. In one well-known case, reported by Israeli Army Radio on 1 January 2024, Israeli officer Harel Itach kidnapped a Palestinian infant after his unit killed all of her family members. When Itach was himself killed in battle, the whereabouts of the baby were unknown.

Rushdi Al-Zhaza, a detainee who was recently released from Israeli custody, was detained along with his family a month ago after they were taken from their home in the Zaytoun neighborhood in the south of Gaza City. He told Euro-Med Monitor that the fate of his wife and two children remain unknown. Al-Zhaza said that the two children had been taken from their mother’s arms, and that when she protested, Israeli soldiers had tied her up, removed her headscarf, and abducted her along with the kids. Weeks later, the soldiers released Al-Zhaza without disclosing the whereabouts or health status of his wife or either of their children. The Israeli army told him that his children would be investigated to ensure they were not Israelis being held in the Gaza Strip. Euro-Med Monitor emphasized that committing such a crime is prohibited under international law in all cases and circumstances, regardless of motive.

Save the Children estimates that 17,000 children have been separated from their families or orphaned since 7 October 2023.

## *Lack of Protection Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*

Palestinians who are not currently in custody, but who are rather under bombardment or seeking refuge in the Gaza Strip, also face increased levels of SGBV. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “[i]ncreased periods of conflict across Gaza have also been historically correlated with increased cases of gender-based violence (GBV), including early and forced marriage, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence.” With most of Gaza’s population currently displaced, the overcrowding and lack of privacy in sheltering spaces exacerbates the risk of SGBV, especially for the over one million women and girls displaced since October 2023.

Furthermore, attacks on civilian objects have limited Palestinian women’s access to protection against abusers and intimate partner violence. According to the 10 June UN report, Israel has deliberately attacked Palestinian women’s rights organizations in Gaza. IDF soldiers left graffiti on the walls of a women’s rights center working with survivors of gender-based violence in Gaza City in mid-November 2023 with racist and misogynistic slurs directed at Palestinian women and girls, such as “[t]he dirty pussies of your prostitutes, you ugly Arab you ugly, you sons of bitches, we will burn you alive you dogs.”

Vital services for GBV survivors are therefore being denied due to the continued destruction of infrastructure and lack of safe spaces, especially for women and girls.

## *Conclusion*

Current allegations of SGBV in Palestine demonstrate an apparent widespread instrumentalization of SGBV as part of Israel’s larger attack on Palestinian people and land in Gaza and the Occupied Territories. The patterns and forms of violence that have come to light are highly indicative of the crime of genocide.

It is important to note that the documented SGBV within the Israeli attack on Gaza is not exceptional but rather systematic and linked to historical operating procedures within the Israeli military. The long-term historical pattern of SGBV against Palestinians must be understood within Israel’s process of expansion through forced displacement and the establishment of settlements. As scholar Andrea Smith has argued, “colonialism is itself structured by the logic of sexual violence” because it is a process that depends on the penetration and destruction of sovereign spaces, a logic that links the penetration of land to the penetration of bodies – particularly female bodies – as the two most important generative forces within indigenous society. Indigenous bodies become “inherently violable” along with the land. In such a system virtually anything can be done to bodies and the land without concern for moral commitments or legal ramifications.

SGBV during this genocide tells us that a full transformation of Israeli society will be necessary once the killing has stopped. While the killing of Palestinians through military attacks, sniper fire, and attrition (hunger and disease) is the main concern at the present moment, once this is brought to a halt, the tentacles of genocide within Israel's entire settler-colonial structure will need to be addressed, otherwise genocide will continue through SGBV in detention and at checkpoints as well as through other identity-destroying techniques of occupation and expansion. Furthermore, a massive and coordinated reconstruction effort must be undertaken for Palestinians that includes attention to the multilayered harm caused by SGBV, lest this memory stand in the way of social reconstruction and healing. Only transformation away from the justification of rape and humiliation of the Other can ensure an end to genocide and a prospect for sustainable peace.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security supports ongoing independent investigations of crimes committed by the Israel state and military and by Hamas, and underscores the importance of a trusted empirical narrative of crimes – especially of SGBV – to a lasting peace.

Finally, the Lemkin Institute emphasizes that the use of sexualized violence is a permanent moral scar on perpetrators and their supporters. It must be tried in a court of law and accounted for in transitional justice processes. Groups who have been victimized by this shameful perpetrator behavior should do everything in their power to overcome harmful social stigmas around sexualized violence in order to embrace, support, and guarantee the security of the survivors, their families, and their communities. Transforming a society beyond one that blames the victims of sexualized violence is a potent form of resistance to attempted annihilation.