

UNHRC 58th Session

Submission of the Institute for NGO Research:

Palestinian Leadership Must be Held Accountable for Gross Human Rights Violations

On October 7, 2023, thousands of Palestinian terrorists breached the border from Gaza invading Israel, massacred 1200 people, torturing and maiming thousands, including 36 children who were slaughtered in their homes. Several of them were horrifically burned alive, while others were brutally murdered in the presence of their parents, or forced to witness their parents being killed before they were murdered as well. Hamas, and other terrorist groups, also kidnapped more than 200 individuals, of which 30 were children, including a 9-month old baby.

In the over 475 days since, the international community has done very little to secure the release of the hostages. International bodies like UNRWA and the ICRC have ignored the plight of the hostages. Some are facing lawsuits for aiding and abetting Hamas' international crimes. Humanitarian actors also enabled the kidnappers and murderers, looking the other way, and remaining silent about Hamas exploitation of civilian infrastructure. Around the world, posters featuring the faces of the kidnapped have been defaced and torn down, erasing crimes against Israelis and attempting to sway public opinion away from Israeli victims. Family members of the hostages have faced mental torture and unrelenting, unbearable pain of not knowing the status of their loved ones. Some have even faced harassment while traveling abroad from "Free Palestine" activists.

To date, 87 hostages are still being held by Hamas. The PA must stop its complicity in hostage taking and do more to aid in the release of the hostages, While the PA may claim that they are not responsible for the actions of Hamas in Gaza, the PA state includes the territory of Gaza and therefore they can not shirk their obligations.

We also call the UN's attention to the PA's political warfare campaign against Israel that prioritizes zero-sum campaigns to demonize Israel at the expense of improving the lives of the Palestinian people – notably in the realms of health, economics, and water. The on-going political infighting between the PA and Hamas has also resulted in human rights violations by both the PA and Hamas against Palestinians primarily in Gaza.

Hostage-Taking as Torture

In November 2023, Israel and Hamas agreed to a temporary ceasefire. The terrorist organization responsible for the October 7 massacre of 1200+ people in Israel, instead of releasing all 250 of hostages held cruelly captive by Hamas, released 104 hostages, and forced Israel to release hundreds of Palestinian criminals convicted of violent crimes including murder, rape, and torture. Hamas refused to release a baby and a young boy, and several teenage girls who are currently being sexually assaulted, tortured, and starved. On August 29, 2024, Hamas executed at point blank range six Israeli hostages who had been held in unspeakable conditions in a Hamas tunnel. According to [statements by released hostages](#), hostages suffered physical and psychological abuse, sexual atrocities, starvation, and unconscionable hygienic conditions. Hamas drugged children and branded them using an exhaust pipe of a motorcycle. Any child who cried was threatened with a gun and children were forced to [watch videos](#) of Hamas atrocities committed against Israel. Many of the children had [skin rashes, lice infestations, and infected wounds](#). Many of the hostages were confined in tunnels in darkness with insufficient food and water. Medical [examinations](#) of returned hostages showed severe physical deterioration and a [decline](#) of their physical and mental well-being, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

On September 1, 2024, the Israel Defense Forces discovered the bodies of the six executed hostages in a tunnel in Rafah, Gaza. The hostages, which were shot at close range, bore indications of torture and severe ill-treatment. The bodies were severely emaciated due to prolonged starvation, with some reportedly weighing as little as 88 pounds (40 kilograms).

Hamas also engaged in sexual assault, publishing horrific images on social media showing members of Hamas engaging in sexual assault. The returning hostages provided [testimonies](#) about explicit accounts of rape and sexual assaults,

The holding of human beings in such conditions clearly constitutes a form of torture.

Torture of Palestinian Civillians by Hamas

Hamas operatives have routinely engaged in extrajudicial executions and torture of civilians in Gaza. The majority of these individuals have been executed for alleged collaboration with Israel, while others have voiced their opposition to Hamas. In January 2025, [footage was released](#) showing more than a dozen Hamas operatives opening fire on three men lying on

the ground. The video is captioned “The moment of punishing the agents of the Zionist occupation who caused the killing of thousands of our Palestinian people in Gaza.”

In November 2024, the Israel Defense Forces [uncovered years' worth of footage](#) of Hamas operatives torturing Palestinian civilians. According to the military, the footage, captured over a two-year period in 2018-2020, exposes “Hamas’s brutal methods for interrogating civilians, violating human rights and systematically oppressing residents suspected of opposing the organization’s rule.” The [footage](#) showed prisoners with sacks over their heads, chained to floors and ceilings, and being beaten with sticks. One scene showed a guard reclining in a chair as a prisoner hangs from the ceiling in front of him.

Diversion of Aid

Humanitarian efforts in war zones are inherently susceptible to extortion and theft by violent actors, including terrorist organizations. In particular, Hamas has a history of raiding aid warehouses and convoys, as well as developing tax schemes designed to skim money off of international largesse. UN Gaza aid mechanisms similarly suffer from corruption, compromising the integrity of imported materials.

For years, UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs have turned a blind eye to terror actors’ diversion of humanitarian aid to produce rockets, build terror tunnels and other instruments, and to personally enrich themselves at the expense of ordinary Gazans. The UN and NGO community have ignored, and in many cases, openly covered up the embedding and co-locating of Hamas weaponry within civilian infrastructure like schools, mosques, and hospitals.

Since October 7, there have been further examples of aid diversion from the Palestinian people for use in terrorist activity. For example, on October 16, 2023, UNRWA [admitted](#) that personnel from the Hamas-run Ministry of Health “removed fuel and medical equipment from the Agency’s compound in Gaza city.” Reflecting the influence of Hamas, UNRWA later denied the claim after public outcry. Additionally, on December 12, 2023, a [video clip](#) circulated on social media, showing humanitarian trucks entering Gaza being hijacked by Hamas gunmen. Few UN officials have taken accountability for this diversion. Instead, the standard approach is one of willful blindness and denial of these crimes. In January 2025, three female hostages [revealed](#) they were held in a United Nations facility.