



Sexual
Violence
Prevention
Association



SORVO Case Study

Israel, Zionist Entities,
& Palestine



Abstract

Historically and contemporarily, oppressive groups have justified acts of sexual violence and the systemic oppression of other groups. This report expands on a new global framework – Systemic Oppression, Reverse Victim, and Offender (SORVO) – to describe how oppressive groups employ strategies of narrative manipulation to justify systemic oppression. By understanding this framework, SORVO can be identified in action, rendered ineffective, and prevented in the future. Identification, paired with policy changes to prevent SORVO, would combat sexual violence and systemic oppression.

Through the lens of the Israel-Palestine conflict, this paper demonstrates how Israel uses SORVO to justify their repressive acts. Data sources include academic journals, reports, first-hand accounts, and historical archives. The case study consists of close examinations of SORVO through analysis of the speech and actions of world leaders, news organizations, and people’s lived experiences.

This report identifies eight narrative manipulation tools oppressive groups such as Israel use to execute SORVO. Specifically, oppressive groups deny, omit, erase, and de-define their acts of sexual violence while sensationalizing, exaggerating, falsifying, and re-defining the actions of the groups they oppress. In doing so, oppressive groups position themselves as “victims” and the population(s) they oppress as “offenders”. This increases support for repressive acts including genocide, settler colonialism, segregation, and systemic sexual violence.

The development of the SORVO framework contributes to the field of systemic sexual violence prevention. This report discusses how the framework has ongoing applications globally and potential implications in legal scholarship, journalistic integrity studies, and progressive policy. The report concludes by describing how SORVO is a prime avenue for future research to prevent sexual violence and systemic oppression, specifically against the Palestinian people.



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About the Sexual Violence Prevention Association

The Sexual Violence Prevention Association (SVPA) is a national nonprofit dedicated to preventing sexual violence systemically. Through advocacy, education, and community engagement, we strive to create a world where everyone can live free from the threat of sexual violence. We believe that by challenging harmful attitudes and behaviors, and advocating for policies that prioritize safety and respect for all, we can prevent sexual violence systemically and create a safer, more equitable society.

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Content Warning

This report contains content that may be distressing or disturbing for some readers. It discusses sexual violence in reference to various other forms of oppression, specifically as it relates to the Israel-Palestine conflict. This includes descriptions of systemic, institutional, and individual acts of sexual violence. The report also discusses the ways in which Israel denies, omits, erases, and redefines acts of sexual violence committed against Palestinians. Passing over sections that may be triggering and reading other case studies from the main SORVO report will still provide readers with an accurate understanding of SORVO as a framework.

The SORVO (*Reverse Victim and Offender: Exaggerate, Sensationalize, Falsify, Redefine*) section involves detailed discussion of sexual violence. It also addresses the phenomenon of wartime rape propaganda and atrocity propaganda in the context of this framework. It is referenced in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The report examines the weaponization of sexual violence as a tool of war. It discusses instances of sexual violence occurring both during and after the events of October 7th, as well as in the context of the ongoing genocide in Palestine. The analysis highlights the significant historical power imbalance between Israeli forces and Palestinians, situating these acts within broader patterns of systemic oppression, settler colonialism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, and human rights abuses. The report references various accounts of rape, torture, strip searches, and other forms of sexual violence against women, men, and children, some of which are described in graphic detail. The report also contains various propaganda images and headlines that may be distressing. Please see the following page for a comprehensive list of resources.

Content Warning

This report contains discussions, imagery, propaganda, and quotes that are upsetting and may be triggering. If at any point you feel overwhelmed, consider taking a break, seeking support from trusted individuals, or referring to the following resources:

Non-Exhaustive List of Resources for Support and Assistance:

- [Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#): Offers support for all survivors of sexual violence.
- [Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling](#): Offers programs for women in the West Bank and Gaza.
- [USA Palestine Mental Health Network](#): Provides various resources for legal and psychological help as well as for children.
- [HEART to Grow Resources](#) Offers support for Muslim Survivors of gendered violence and any individual impacted by state violence, including those in the Palestinian, sudanese and Congolese diaspora
- [HEART to Grow Mutual Aid Funds](#): Offers three mutual aid funds to provide financial assistance to directly impacted individuals. Whether you need help covering therapy costs, legal fees, or other essentials, we are here to support you during this challenging time.
- [UNRWA](#): UNRWA provides a list of helplines for those in the West Bank, Gaza, and other areas. For sexual violence specific assistance they provide a guide on [how to report it](#).
- [Resources for Holocaust Survivors](#): The Holocaust Memorial Museum has put together resources for survivors and their families.
- [Helpline for Jewish Survivors](#): Mount Sinai provides a helpline for all survivors of sexual violence. Call 888-613-1613.
- [Committee to Protect Journalists](#): offers a comprehensive list of resources for both pre-assignment and post incident.
- [Resources for Immigrant Survivors](#): ASISTA offers assistance and resources for immigrant survivors of violence.
- [UN Office for Sexual Violence In Conflict](#): The UN offers research, insights, and resources on sexual violence in conflict.

Introduction



Introduction

This report covers an ongoing conflict. Though it was published in September 2025, data collection ceased in March 2025.

Historical Context

Systemic Oppression Reverse Victim and Offender, or *SORVO*, is a tactic employed by oppressive groups to weaponize sexual violence, and accusations thereof, to justify their oppression. This framework was created by the Sexual Violence Prevention Association (SVPA) to explore the ways in which oppressive groups falsely claim that an oppressed group commits high rates of sexual violence, therefore allowing the oppressive group to use this claim as justification for further oppression of the oppressed group. Furthermore, this oppression includes widespread sexual violence at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels by the oppressive group.

There are eight narrative manipulation tools oppressive groups use to execute *SORVO*: oppressive groups deny, omit, erase, and de-define their acts of sexual violence while sensationalizing, exaggerating, falsifying, and re-defining the actions of the groups they oppress. In the *SORVO Case Study: Jim Crow*, we explain how white women made false accusations of sexual victimization by Black men, a fabricated narrative that white leadership legitimized and spread. This was then used to rationalize segregation and extreme violence, increasing sympathy for white Americans while dehumanizing Black

Americans. In using this narrative manipulation strategy, the roles of victim and offender are effectively reversed, increasing support for oppressive acts including segregation, settler colonialism, genocide, and systemic sexual violence.

This research will explore the implementation of *SORVO* to analyze how Israel has crafted a false narrative surrounding the current conflict.¹ Furthermore, Israel continues to use its power as the oppressor through state actions and media manipulation to garner global support for the atrocities they commit in the Gaza Strip.

This analysis will carefully examine the rhetoric from Israeli leaders, global allies, and the media to uncover the propaganda and motivations behind it. In addition, this report will investigate how exploitative rhetoric and *Wartime Rape Propaganda* have been deployed, as well as the selective inclusion and exclusion of Palestinian voices. This includes addressing the mass silencing that results from Israel's ban on journalists in Gaza, compounded by the tragic loss of over 181 members of the press in the ongoing conflict.²



¹ SVPA - Sexual Violence Prevention Association. 2025. "SORVO Report — SVPA." SVPA. May 1, 2025. <https://s-v-p-a.org/sorvo/>.

² Jeremy Bowen, "Israel is Accused of the Gravest War Crimes- How Governments Respond Could Haunt Them for Years to Come," BBC, June 8, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0r1xl5wgnko>.

SORVO Infographic

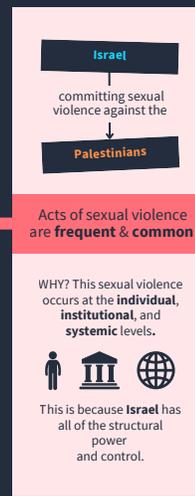
Please note, the language in this infographic has been simplified. While the core information is presented accurately, some content may have been condensed or reworded for brevity.

Systemic Oppression



Reverse Victim & Offender

Reality



Narrative Manipulation

Israel shifts the narrative using the following tactics:



False Narrative



Narrative Manipulation Tactics

Deny
Israel denies committing sexual violence against Palestinians.



Exaggerate
Palestinian's acts of sexual violence against Israel are overblown, inflated, or outsized.

Omit
Israel controls the narrative and omits their sexual violence against Palestinians.



Sensationalize
Palestinian's acts of sexual violence against Israel are portrayed emotionally, vividly, and covered frequently.

Erase
Israel erases evidence of their sexual violence against Palestinians by destroying evidence, killing witnesses, silencing reporters, and discrediting reports.



Falsify
Palestinian's acts of sexual violence against Israel are fabricated, vague, and baseless.

De-Define
Israel's acts of sexual violence against Palestinians are not defined as sexual violence.



Re-Define
Palestinian's non-sexual acts or consensual sexual acts are redefined as sexual violence.

Systemic Oppression



Systemic Oppression

Analyzing the employment of SORVO by Israeli leadership and its allies first requires an understanding of existing power dynamics between Israel and Palestine. It is important to highlight the conditions in Gaza before the Hamas attacks on October 7th to contextualize the Israeli government's decades-long oppressive actions against Palestinians.³ The Gaza Strip has been described by human rights groups as the "largest open-air prison". Since 2007, it has been bordered by Israeli fences and walls and under a blockade by Israel and Egypt. Israel has control of Gaza's borders, including its airspace and access to the Mediterranean Sea.⁴ Israel also controls what goods can cross into the territory and restricts the movement of people in and out. Palestinians have no voting rights in Israel despite the Israeli government's control over their daily lives.⁵ This leaves very few avenues for Palestinians to advocate for a change in their circumstances.

Conditions in Gaza have been deteriorating significantly since the blockade was imposed in 2007. Prior to the events of October 7, over 80% of the population was living in poverty according to the United Nations.⁶ Clean water was unavailable for 95% of the population of Gaza, about half of whom were children, and over 80% of those living in the territory relied on aid due to the restrictions imposed by Israel.

Additionally, the blockade caused regular supply and personnel shortages in hospitals.⁷ Israel holds political, economic, and military power over Palestinians in Gaza at the systemic and institutional levels.

The oppression of Palestinians by Israel throughout history has laid the groundwork for the violence in Gaza following October 7th. Since these events, over 50,000 Palestinians have been killed.⁸ The UN estimates that nearly 70% of the war dead in Gaza are women and children.⁹ Nearly 75% of the population is displaced, and over 60% of Gaza's housing has been damaged or destroyed.¹⁰ A widespread famine has broken out as Israel continues to bar foreign aid from entering Gaza. More than 250 humanitarian aid workers have been killed.¹¹

This is also the deadliest war for journalists on record, with more than 181 having been killed in Gaza since the fighting broke out.¹² Furthermore, the United Nations has also received information about sexual violence committed against Palestinian men and women in detention, at checkpoints, and during house raids by Israeli forces.¹³ To implement SORVO, the oppressive group, in this case Israel, uses sexual violence or wartime rape propaganda to justify the systemic oppression (including genocide) of Palestinians. This oppression includes sexual violence at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

³ Fatima Al-Kassab, "What Is the Gaza Strip? Here's What to Know," NPR, October 10, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/10/1204873146/what-is-gaza-strip>

⁴ Fatima Al-Kassab, "What Is the Gaza Strip? Here's What to Know," NPR, October 10, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/10/1204873146/what-is-gaza-strip>

⁵ Fatima Al-Kassab, "What Is the Gaza Strip? Here's What to Know," NPR, October 10, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/10/1204873146/what-is-gaza-strip>

⁶ Fatima Al-Kassab, "What Is the Gaza Strip? Here's What to Know," NPR, October 10, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/10/1204873146/what-is-gaza-strip>

⁷ Fatima Al-Kassab, "What Is the Gaza Strip? Here's What to Know," NPR, October 10, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/10/1204873146/what-is-gaza-strip>

⁸ "50,000 killed in Gaza since start of Israel-Hamas war, health ministry says." 2025. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/23/middleeast/50-000-killed-in-gaza-since-start-of-israel-hamas-war-intl/index.html>.

⁹ "Nearly 70% of Gaza war dead women and children - UN." 2024. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn5wel11pgdo>.

¹⁰ "Crisis in Gaza: What Is Happening?" The International Rescue Committee, July 5, 2024. <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-gaza-what-you-need-know>.

¹¹ "Crisis in Gaza: What Is Happening?" The International Rescue Committee, July 5, 2024. <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-gaza-what-you-need-know>.

¹² D. Parvaz, "In Gaza, Palestinian Journalists Are Documenting a War They're Also Trying to Survive," NPR, March 15, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/15/1221513717/gaza-journalists-israel-hamas>.

¹³ "UN Experts Say Grounds to Believe Rape Occurred in Hamas Attack on Israel," Al Jazeera, March 4, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/4/reasonable-grounds-to-believe-hamas-committed-sexual-violence-un>.

Reverse Victim and Offender



Reverse Victim and Offender

Exaggerate, Sensationalize, Redefine, Falsify

Sexual violence as atrocity propaganda is not a new phenomenon. It is effective because it garners support for victims and can create an in-group versus out-group mentality. An oppressive group manipulates an individual instance of rape to vilify an entire group, creating the idea of a collective threat. Existing racial or ethnic tensions often feed into this mentality. In the case of Israel and Palestine, it is impossible to ignore Islamophobia as a pretext for Israel's use of SORVO. A common Islamophobic trope is the false stereotype that Muslim men, particularly Arab men, are misogynistic and prone to committing sexual violence.

This existing racism has made equating "Hamis terrorist" with "rapist" a relatively easy task for Israel because sustained global propaganda and moral panics have long stigmatized Arab and Muslim men as barbaric and violent. This means that the media has a particular responsibility to meticulously fact-check when reporting on sexual violence from October 7th. Journalists must understand their own biases and the importance of reporting without sensationalizing; Settler states have a long history of violence against Black and Brown men under the false pretenses of retaliatory justice for women.

During this conflict, Israel has claimed that Hamas committed high levels of sexual violence on October 7th.¹⁴ Rape is never acceptable, and it is often deployed as a weapon of war despite being considered a war crime. According to the UN, there are reasonable grounds to believe there were individual acts of violence on October 7th.¹⁵ Believing survivors is the heart of any movement to end sexual violence, and there is a long history of institutions, individuals, media, and law enforcement retraumatizing victims by dismissing their experiences. This analysis is specifically intended to investigate the ways in which oppressive groups weaponize these accounts to justify collective punishment and, in this case, a genocide against an entire people.

In addition, some of the reporting by major news organizations has been found to lack diligent fact-checking.¹⁶ The same United Nations investigation that found credible circumstantial information that sexual violence occurred on October 7th also found some concerning misinformation.

At least two widely reported instances were deemed to be unfounded after new information was uncovered and inconsistencies in the facts gathered were identified.¹⁷ There were several other reports that could not be verified, but were still widely spread as factual. On December 28th, 2023, the *New York Times* published an

¹⁴ Goldenberg, Tia, and Julia Frankel. 2024. "Israel-Hamas War: How 2 Debunked Accounts of Sexual Violence Fueled Global Dispute | AP News." AP News. May 22, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-sexual-violence-zaka-ca7905bf9520b1e646f86d72cdf03244>.

¹⁵ "UN Experts Say Grounds to Believe Rape Occurred in Hamas Attack on Israel." Al Jazeera, March 4, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/4/reasonable-grounds-to-believe-hamas-committed-sexual-violence-un>.

¹⁶ Jeremy Scahill, Daniel Boguslaw, and Ryan Grim, "'Between the Hammer and the Anvil' The Story Behind the New York Times October 7 Exposé," The Intercept, February 28, 2024. <https://theintercept.com/2024/02/28/new-york-times-anat-schwartz-october-7/>.

¹⁷ "UN Experts Say Grounds to Believe Rape Occurred in Hamas Attack on Israel." Al Jazeera, March 4, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/4/reasonable-grounds-to-believe-hamas-committed-sexual-violence-un>.

Reverse Victim and Offender



Figure 1. On December 28, 2023, the New York Times published this front-page article describing “weaponized sexual violence” on October 7. The article has been debunked by multiple sources and includes sensationalizing and graphic language to describe sexual violence.

article entitled “Screams without Words: How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on October 7th”.¹⁸ The article was detailed and inflammatory, and it featured an Israeli woman who was allegedly sexually assaulted before her death on October 7th. Her family has denied these accounts and was not made aware prior to its publishing that the article would include descriptions of sexual violence.

They reported following the publication multiple times that she was not raped, with her brother-in-law stating that “the media invented it.”¹⁹



Figure 2. In December 2023, the New York Times published a front-page article featuring the story of a woman who was raped on October 7th. The family of the woman has repeatedly denied that she was raped.

The reporter hired by the *New York Times* to author the piece has a history on social media of anti-Palestinian sentiment (such as liking a tweet that Israel should “turn the [Gaza] strip into a slaughterhouse”).²⁰ This speaks to not only how sexual violence is used as a tool of propaganda, but also how journalistic bias leads to inaccurate reporting.

The “Screams Without Words” story was also critically timed. It was published as global support was waning for Israel’s campaign of violence in Gaza, and, in many ways, it single-handedly reversed that sentiment. Other journalists at the *New York Times* expressed concerns over the article’s reliability, as well as potential consequences for the Palestinians for publishing such an inflammatory piece.²¹

¹⁸ Gettleman, Jeffrey, Anat Schwartz, Adam Sella, and Avishag Shaar-Yashuv. 2024. “How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7.” *The New York Times*, March 25, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/28/world/middleeast/oct-7-attacks-hamas-israel-sexual-violence.html>.

¹⁹ The Short String. “Family of Key Case in New York Times October 7 Sexual Violence Report Renounces Story, Says Reporters Manipulated Them.” *Mondoweiss*, January 3, 2024. <https://mondoweiss.net/2024/01/family-of-key-case-in-new-york-times-october-7-sexual-violence-report-renounces-story-says-reporters-manipulated-them>

²⁰ Jeremy Scahill, Daniel Boguslaw, and Ryan Grim, “Between the Hammer and the Anvil” The Story Behind the New York Times October 7 Exposé,” *The Intercept*, February 28, 2024, <https://theintercept.com/2024/02/28/new-york-times-anat-schwartz-october-7/>.

²¹ Jeremy Scahill, Daniel Boguslaw, and Ryan Grim, “Between the Hammer and the Anvil” The Story Behind the New York Times October 7 Exposé,” *The Intercept*, February 28, 2024, <https://theintercept.com/2024/02/28/new-york-times-anat-schwartz-october-7/>.

Reverse Victim and Offender

An investigation by the SVPA analyzed 65 articles in the *New York Times* and *Politico* that mentioned sexual violence pertaining to this conflict between October 7, 2023 and October 7, 2024. Of these, 43 articles (66%) focused on sexual violence against Israelis, while only 14 (22%) focused on sexual violence against Palestinians. The remaining 8 (12%) had focuses on sexual violence against both Israelis and Palestinians. This is a strong bias in the amount of coverage dedicated to positioning Israelis as victims as opposed to Palestinians.

New York Times and Politico Articles that Mentioned Sexual Violence

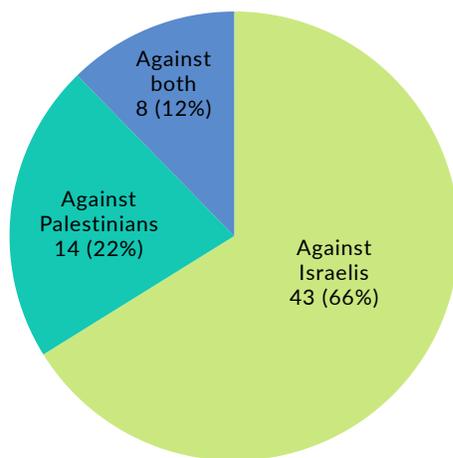


Figure 3. Count of articles in the *New York Times* and *Politico* that mentioned sexual violence against Israelis and/or Palestinians between October 7, 2023 through October 7, 2024

This type of coverage – sensationalized, falsified, or biased – demonstrates how stories of sexual violence are often weaponized by oppressive powers to justify retaliation. This particular weaponization of the narrative is described as “wartime rape propaganda”.²² *Heart to Grow* published a report in March 2024 about the positioning of settler colonial powers as victims through the lens of sexual violence entitled *No Perfect Victim: Who Gets Believed and Unpacking Wartime Rape Propaganda*. The report defines wartime rape propaganda as sexual violence that is weaponized by settler colonial powers to justify retaliation:

“

“Wartime Rape Propaganda upholds patriarchal values in line with political agendas. It pulls on toxic values surrounding gender, purity, and sex to both humiliate people who are victims of this assault, as well as manipulate audiences into various emotional states, such as anger and grief. It is often written using inflammatory language, sensationalizing the details, and can often be retraumatizing, triggering, and stigmatizing for survivors of sexual assault to read. It is not intended to uplift survivor voices, but rather it is intended to create harm and justify violence toward the perpetrator and the perpetrator’s community.” - *Heart to Grow*, 2024²³

”

²² Nadia Khansa, “No Perfect Victim: Who Gets Believed & Unpacking Wartime Rape Propaganda,” *Heart to Grow*, March 27, 2024, <https://hearttogrow.org/resources/no-perfect-victim-who-gets-believed-unpacking-wartime-rape-propaganda/>.

²³ Khan, Nadia, SA. 2023. “Screams Without Words: How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on October 7.” Article. *New York Times*. <https://hearttogrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/No-Perfect-Victim-Who-Gets-Believed-Unpacking-Wartime-Rape-Propaganda.pdf>.

Reverse Victim and Offender

The sensationalizing of sexual violence accounts from October 7th by various media organizations and the Israeli government garnered global attention. Simultaneously, the conflict in Gaza intensified, and legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice began to put new scrutiny on Israel's actions. On January 11th, 2024, South Africa brought a case to the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza. At this point, 23,000 Palestinians had been killed, the conflict had been deemed a humanitarian crisis, and there were reported calls for death and displacement of Palestinians by Israeli officials.²⁴

Importantly, Israel's defense team focused much of its testimony on the events of October 7th, highlighting sexual violence and other atrocities. This is significant because, in effect, Israel is not denying its actions. Rather, Israel is claiming it has a right to these actions because of the events of October 7th. Israeli legal advisor Tal Becker stated, "[Hamas] tortured children in front of parents and parents in front of children, burned people, including infants alive, and systematically raped and mutilated scores of women, men and children."²⁵ The facts of this quote are not up for debate in the International Criminal Court, nor are they relevant to Israel's murder of Palestinian children. SORVO is used as a tool to justify systemic oppression by the group with political, economic, and military power over an oppressed group through highlighting, falsifying, and exploiting sexual violence.

This use of narrative manipulation through the SORVO framework has been used to justify the systemic oppression of Palestinians through a massive campaign of violence. Hamas has no structural power or control over Israel, so their perpetration of sexual violence is strictly at the individual level. Israel's oppression of Palestinians, on the other hand, includes sexual violence at systemic, institutional, and individual levels.

Exaggerate

Israel amplifies its nationalist, in-group identity by exaggerating the accounts of sexual violence from October 7th. Much of the media has described the violence from this day as "mass rapes", equating these instances to a calculated effort by a unified force rather than individual instances. This is important because, while many of the events from that day are still being investigated, it creates a narrative of collective victimhood and a monolithic (racialized) offender. Indeed, these events have consistently been referenced as justification for the punishment of Palestinians as a whole.

The exaggeration of sexual violence on October 7th is reflected in repetitive and extensive references made by world leaders, often unprompted and out of context, when pressured to explain the campaign of violence committed against Palestinians in Gaza over the past year. This includes US leadership's unwavering support for funding Israel. For example, both President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have repeatedly

²⁴ Isabel Kershner and John Eligon, "At World Court, Israel to Confront Accusations of Genocide," *The New York Times*, January 10, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/10/world/middleeast/israel-genocide-case-south-africa-icj.html>.

²⁵ Komreich, Yaakov. 2024. "Israel Accused of Genocide at the International Court - Yated.com." Yated.Com. January 24, 2024. <https://yated.com/israel-accused-of-genocide-at-the-international-court/>.

Reverse Victim and Offender

responded to questions about funding Israel's military by referencing accounts of sexual violence on October 7th.²⁶ At the presidential debate in July of 2024, Vice President Kamala Harris said, "On Oct. 7, Hamas, a terrorist organization, slaughtered 1,200 Israelis. [...] Women were horribly raped. And so absolutely, I said then, I say now, Israel has a right to defend itself."²⁷ Harris's impulse to highlight sexual violence unprompted and as a justification for supplying bombs, which have been used to murder over 50,000 people as of the date of the debate, is an example of exaggeration to perpetuate SORVO.

justification for harming others. Second, it fuels destructive and false claims that victims lie about sexual violence. When a government exaggerates or outright falsifies instances of sexual violence, it contributes to the broader problem of victims not being believed. Finally, this particular case of exaggeration is racialized. The notion of "mass rapes"²⁸ implies a systematic nature to the sexual violence, which furthers the narrative that this was perpetrated by an entire group—implying that their collective identity is a factor in the violence. This builds on the massive, global problem of Islamophobia against Arab men.



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ISRAEL, MIDDLE EAST, NEWS, PALESTINE

UN expert says claims of systematic sexual violence on 7 October remain unverified as Israel releases new report

July 10, 2025 at 3:01 pm

Figure 4. Both Fox News and the Middle East Monitor published articles claiming that Hamas commits systematic sexual violence, using October 7 as an example.

Exaggerating the extent and nature of sexual violence creates multiple harms. First, it exploits victims by using their trauma and the violence committed against them as a

Sensationalize

One of the most effective methods for Israel to garner support for the violent campaign against Palestinians is to appeal to the emotional aspects of October 7th. The media sensationalizes the events, adding shock value and graphic detail to elicit a response and a rousing call for punishment. The *Intercept* did a linguistic analysis of the rhetoric used by three major news sources – the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* – and found distinct discrepancies in how the publications covered the Israel-Hamas conflict. When disentangling the rhetoric, the *Intercept* journalists found disparities in the ways language was used to describe the death toll in Israel compared to that in Gaza:

²⁶ Forward. 2024. "How Biden Condemned Hamas for Rape Before the IDF Had Evidence It Happened." The Forward. July 16, 2024. <https://forward.com/news/564318/sexual-assault-rape-proof-hamas-idf-israel-gaza/>.

²⁷ Hoffman, Riley. 2024. "READ: Harris-Trump Presidential Debate Transcript." ABC News. September 11, 2024. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/harris-trump-presidential-debate-transcript/story?id=113560542>.

²⁸ Schwartz, Anat, and Jeffrey Gettleman. 2023. "What We Know About Sexual Violence During the Oct. 7 Attacks on Israel (Published 2023)." The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/04/world/middleeast/oct-7-attacks-israel-hamas-sexual-violence.html>.

Reverse Victim and Offender

Los Angeles Times, New York Times and Washington Post's Usage of Terms

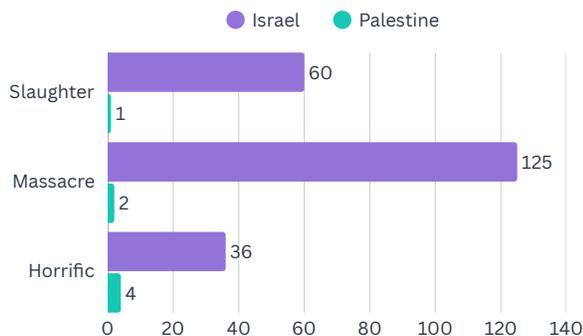


Figure 5. Count of times editors and reporters from the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* used the words “slaughter”, “massacre”, and “horrific” were used to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians.²⁹

The SVPA’s own analysis of sexual violence-related articles in the *New York Times* and *Politico* between October 7th, 2023 and October 7th, 2024 found that articles discussing sexual violence against Israelis tended to be more personal, discussing individual stories of victims. In comparison, articles that discussed sexual violence against Palestinians were told more generally and less personally, removing the reader from the issue.

The *New York Times* article, “Screams without Words”, is an example of this in the context of sexual violence. The report has been heavily criticized for using provocative language and unverified graphic detail. Sensationalizing sexual violence is a strong tool for leadership to use when implementing SORVO because it creates an emotional response from the public.



LEST WE FORGET

Figure 6. On December 11, 2023, the *Times Record* published a political cartoon depicting a person with a Palestinian flag and a “Hamas” armband, physically restraining a woman with blood surrounding her.

Redefine

Redefining is the work of positioning consensual or nonsexual acts as violence, or redefining sexual violence itself in targeted, provocative ways. An example of this occurred in July 2023, following a high-profile case in which a Jewish Israeli woman was raped by a Palestinian man. In response, the Knesset passed a new law creating a special category of sexual violence: sexual assault and sexual harassment committed with ‘nationalistic motivations’. These crimes are now considered ‘sexual terrorism’, prosecutable under the 2016 terrorism law, making the maximum sentence life imprisonment.³⁰

These racially targeted laws were introduced despite vocal opposition from the survivor herself and from feminist groups who declared that the Parliament was, in effect, stating that Israeli survivors of rape by Jewish Israeli men

²⁹ Johnson, Adam, and Othman Ali. 2024. “Coverage of Gaza War in the *New York Times* and Other Major Newspapers Heavily Favored Israel, Analysis Shows.” *The Intercept*, January 10, 2024. <https://theintercept.com/2024/01/09/newspapers-israel-palestine-bias-new-york-times/>.

³⁰ Elisheva Goldberg, “Israel’s Anti-Miscegenation Law,” *Jewish Currents*, August 15, 2023, <https://jewishcurrents.org/israels-anti-miscegenation-law>.

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were less deserving of justice and sympathy.³¹ As author Dana Frank has argued in Haaretz, the current mobilization of sexual violence allegations in Israel co-opts feminist language to advance the Israeli state's militarist and racist agendas.³²



Figure 7. On January 9, 2024, the Jewish News Syndicate published this Dry Bones comic, which states Palestinians are “kidnappers, rapists, and murderers.” Thus implying that Israel is justified in their war crimes that they were on trial for at the International Court of Justice. At the time, over 23,000 civilians in Gaza had been killed.

Redefining sexual violence in targeted, racialized ways creates an avenue for collective punishment by identifying perpetrators as members of a specific group. This builds the in-group, out-group mentality that furthers stereotypes about who victims are and who perpetrators are. *Heart to Grow* describes the ways in which the idea of the “perfect victim” plays into this phenomenon in a racist and often Islamophobic manner. In their report, *No Perfect Victim: Who Gets Believed and Unpacking Wartime Rape Propaganda*, they describe the consequences of assigning patriarchal and toxic values surrounding gender, purity, and sex in racialized ways:

“

“...stories are being framed as one-sided acts of barbarism, and in such a way that insinuates that Israel would never treat Palestinian victims this way, despite all the well documented horror stories of Israel using torture on Palestinian prisoners, as well as actively committing genocide where women and children are also suffering.” - *Heart to Grow*, 2024

”

The positioning of all Israelis as victims and, thus, all Palestinians as perpetrators furthers the in-group, out-group definitions of sexual violence surrounding this conflict and the situation in Gaza more broadly.

Falsify

Although sexual violence likely occurred on October 7th, the Israeli government failed to preserve evidence and refused to comply with the UN investigation into these claims.³³ This is not only a method for falsifying claims but also a disservice to victims. Israeli women’s groups have called out the responding entities for their failures to preserve evidence and document any potential sexual violence or gender-based violence.³⁴ This is crucial as it reveals that, instead of conducting a thorough investigation to support victims, Israeli leadership prioritized amplifying false claims to justify the collective punishment of Palestinians.

³¹ Anonymous, “I’m the Jewish Woman Sexually Attacked by an Arab. Don’t Use Me to Feed Your Racism: Opinion,” Haaretz.com, March 19, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-19/ty-article-opinion/.premium/im-the-jewish-woman-sexually-attacked-by-an-arab-dont-use-me-to-feed-your-racism/00000186-f9e3-df62-adfe-fbf333960000>.

³² Dana Frank, “פחות תמימות, פחות אחריות, פחות מטרות מסתרות אחרות, מאחורי הקמפיין נגד ארגוני נשים מסתרות מטרות אחרות, Less Innocent Goals,” Haaretz, December 6, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/the-edge/2023-12-06/ty-article/.highlight/0000018c-3ee0-d826-ab9e-bfff7260000>.

³³ Bethan McKernan, “Israel Women’s Groups Warn of Failure to Keep Evidence of Sexual Violence in Hamas Attacks,” The Guardian, November 10, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/israel-womens-groups-warn-of-failure-to-keep-evidence-of-sexual-violence-in-hamas-attacks>.

³⁴ Bethan McKernan, “Israel Women’s Groups Warn of Failure to Keep Evidence of Sexual Violence in Hamas Attacks,” The Guardian, November 10, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/israel-womens-groups-warn-of-failure-to-keep-evidence-of-sexual-violence-in-hamas-attacks>.

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 HAARETZ

Israel Blocks UN Probe Into Hamas Sexual Crimes From October 7 to Avoid Inquiry Into Abuse of Palestinians



Liza Rozovsky
Jan 8, 2025

Israel is blocking the United Nations from investigating sexual crimes committed by Hamas during its October 7 attack, fearing it would require granting access to probe allegations of sexual violence against Palestinians in Israeli detention.

Figure 8. Haaretz posted an article detailing how Israel has prevented the UN from looking into sexual violence crimes committed against Palestinians. This is further discussed in a press release from Relief Web which notes that “for the past 15 months, Israel has consistently refused to cooperate with all United Nations bodies with an investigative mandate to examine allegations of rape and other forms of sexual violence arising from the attacks of 7 October.”

Initially, the UN had attempted numerous times to open a full investigation into the allegations of sexual violence by Hamas on October 7th. Israel repeatedly blocked this effort, using tactics such as instructing medical staff who treated victims of the Hamas attack not to talk to UN officials.³⁵

Because of this, a smaller report was put forward with a UN official whose stated “main concern” was doing everything possible for the remaining hostages. This is not only biased, but the blockage of a more thorough investigation demonstrates that Israel is interested in falsifying claims to justify a further genocide. Eventually, this smaller UN report on sexual violence on October 7th later found no evidence of systematic rape by Hamas or any other Palestinian group, despite widespread media reporting to the contrary.³⁶ Furthermore, the same UN investigator has since expressed “serious concern” over reported instances of sexual violence perpetrated *against* Palestinians in detention by Israeli soldiers.³⁷

³⁵ Liza Rozovsky. "Israel Blocks UN Probe Into Hamas Sexual Crimes From October 7 to Avoid Inquiry Into Abuse of Palestinians." Haaretz, January 8, 2025.

³⁶ Feminist Solidarity Network for Palestine, "Here's What Pramila Patten's UN Report on Oct 7 Sexual Violence Actually Said," Mondoweiss, March 11, 2024, <https://mondoweiss.net/2024/03/heres-what-pramila-pattens-un-report-on-oct-7-sexual-violence-actually-said/>.

³⁷ Boezio, Geraldine. n.d. "UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, Expresses Serious Concerns Over Reported Instances of Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence Against Palestinian Detainees – United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict." <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/un-special-representative-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict-ms-pramila-patten-expresses-serious-concerns-over-reported-instances-of-rape-and-other-forms-of-sexual-violence-against-palestinian-detainee/>.

Reverse Victim and Offender

Deny, Omit, Erase, De-define

This section will introduce the fact that there is widespread sexual violence being committed against Palestinians, particularly by IDF soldiers, who represent the *state* committing the abuse. It should be noted that this abuse started long before October 7. The UN Commission on Human Rights explains:



*“Sexual and Gender Based Violence constitutes a major element in the ill-treatment of Palestinians, intended to humiliate the community at large. This violence is intrinsically linked to the wider context of inequality and prolonged occupation, which have provided the conditions and the rationale for gender-based crimes, to further accentuate the subordination of the occupied people. The Commission notes that these crimes must be addressed by tackling their root cause; through dismantling the historically oppressive structures and institutionalized system of discrimination against Palestinians, which are at the core of the occupation.”*³⁸ United Nations, 2024



Palestinian women have endured decades of denial of bodily autonomy and integrity as well as sexual violence for the duration of the occupation. Sexual violence against Palestinian women by Israeli security forces is most common at checkpoints or during house raids.³⁹ This includes all forms of sexual violence as well as public strip searches.⁴⁰ Palestinian women also experience sexual violence while visiting their relatives in Israeli jails, when attending court hearings of their relatives, and during interrogations by both male and female interrogators.⁴¹

The failure to condemn or even register sexual violence against Palestinians persists despite extensive evidence, including numerous first-person testimonies of sexual violence in Israeli detention.⁴² The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that between October 7th and December 27th, 2023, the Internal Security Force carried out mass arrests involving sexual and gender-based violence such as genital beatings, forced nudity captured on video, sexual slurs, and threats of rape.⁴³ Reports such as this are now accompanied by an extensive photo and video archive circulated by Israeli forces of Palestinian men and boys tied up, blindfolded, and semi-naked.⁴⁴ In some cases, the IDF has confirmed that the majority of these men are civilians.⁴⁵

³⁸ “Israeli authorities, Palestinian armed groups are responsible for war crimes, other grave violations of international law, UN Inquiry finds.” 2024. ohchr. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/06/israeli-authorities-palestinian-armed-groups-are-responsible-war-crimes>.

³⁹ Human Rights Council and Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. 2025. “More Than a Human Can Bear: Israel’s Systematic Use of Sexual, Reproductive and Other Forms of Gender-based Violence Since 7 October 2023.” Report. A/HRC/58/CRP.6. <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Report-of-Independent-International-Commission-of-Inquiry-on-the-Occupied-Palestinian-Territory-13-March-2025.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Shbair, Bilal, and Patrick Kingsley. 2024. “Inside Sde Teiman, the Base Where Israel Detains Gazans.” The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/06/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-detention-base.html?searchResultPosition=14>.

⁴¹ Madar, Revital. “Beyond Male Israeli Soldiers, Palestinian Women, Rape, and War: Israeli State Sexual Violence against Palestinians”, *Conflict and Society* 9, 1 (2023): 72-88, accessed Dec 13, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2023.090105>

⁴² Madar, Revital. “Beyond Male Israeli Soldiers, Palestinian Women, Rape, and War: Israeli State Sexual Violence against Palestinians”, *Conflict and Society* 9, 1 (2023): 72-88, accessed Dec 13, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2023.090105>

⁴³ “Flash Report on the Human Rights Situation in the West Bank Including East Jerusalem, 7 October - 20 November 2023,” United Nations, December 28, 2023, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/flash-report-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-the-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem-7-october-20-november-2023-un-human-rights-office-ohchr/>.

⁴⁴ Yuval Abraham, “Inside Israel’s Torture Camp for Gaza Detainees,” 972 Magazine, January 5, 2024, <https://www.972mag.com/israel-torture-camp-gaza-detainees/>.

⁴⁵ Heidi Matthews and Tanya Serisier, “Bombing Gaza Isn’t Fighting Sexual Violence,” CounterPunch, January 16, 2024, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/01/16/bombing-gaza-isnt-fighting-sexual-violence/>.

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The UN report details numerous accounts of sexual violence, including physical abuse like electrocution to the genitals and anus, forced nudity, and threats of rape.⁴⁶ In some cases, Israeli guards recorded nude Palestinians as they sexually abused them.⁴⁷ The Israeli human rights advocacy group, B'Tselem, put forward a report in August of 2024 regarding the abuses in detention centers against Palestinians, with a spokesperson noting:

“

*“We heard similar accounts of sexual abuse, starvation and assault from separate prisoners held in 16 different locations across Israel. It was depressing. As we gathered the testimonies, we realised that every witness account was almost identical, no matter what their age, gender or location was. There’s no doubt. This kind of abuse is systematic,” August 9, 2024.*⁴⁸

”

The tools an oppressive group uses to further a systemic, institutional, and individual campaign of sexual violence against an oppressed group are deny, omit, erase, and de-define. The Israeli government, with the assistance of biased media, effectively executes each of these tactics against Palestinians.

The oppressive group in this case is the state of Israel and complicit world leaders. It is also



Israeli protesters rally for ‘the right to rape’ prisoners

Protesters, politicians and TV commentators in Israel are defending the right of soldiers to mistreat and even rape Palestinian prisoners in detention. The show of support follows the gang rape of a male detainee by a group of Israeli reservists.

13 Aug 2024

Figure 9. Al Jazeera posted an article on August 13, 2024, in which Israeli protestors are rallying for the right of soldiers to sexually harass, rape, and mistreat Palestinian prisoners.

important to acknowledge that there is an anti-semitic legacy of painting Jewish people as power-hungry and as rapists. This was a common tool used by the Nazi regime in Germany to employ SORVO to further their own oppressive agenda. This anti-semitic tool creates serious harm, and should continue to be addressed. The SVPA published a report on this subject in October of 2024.

The purpose of this report is to understand the ways in which the state of Israel is perpetrating sexual violence as a tool of oppression against Palestinians while denying, omitting, erasing, and de-defining these acts to further that oppression.

⁴⁶ Cumming, Nick. 2024. “U.N. Report Accuses Both Israel and Palestinian Groups of War Crimes.” The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/12/world/middleeast/un-report-israel-hamas-war-crimes.html?searchResultPosition=38>.

⁴⁷ Sharon Zhang, “UN Report Details Vast, Systemic Torture of Palestinians in Israeli Detention,” Truthout, July 31, 2024, <https://truthout.org/articles/un-report-details-vast-systemic-torture-of-palestinians-in-israeli-detention/>.

⁴⁸ Simon Speakman Cordall, “‘Everything Is Legitimate’: Israeli Leaders Defend Soldiers Accused of Rape,” Al Jazeera, August 9, 2024, <https://aje.io/8v81xp>.

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Deny

To maintain the illusion of their victimhood, oppressive groups must deny any acts of sexual violence they perpetrate upon the oppressed. This is one effective way to shift culpability for any wrongdoing – rather than justify or shift blame, denying the existence of sexual violence is a powerful example of control over oppressed peoples as well as control over the media. The Israeli government has done this effectively, partly by making a false equivalency. When accusations of sexual violence against Palestinians are brought to Israel, the leadership has been hasty to explain that sexual violence occurred against Israelis on October 7th. Another common tactic is to claim that these accusations are antisemitic. This deflection is a form of denial because it redirects the conversation from any Israeli wrongdoing.



UN report accuses Israel of sexual violence against Palestinians. Netanyahu claims anti-Israel bias

BY JAMEY KEATEN

Updated 9:14 PM EDT, March 13, 2025

Figure 10. On March 13, 2025, the Associated Press published an article covering the release of a UN report accusing Israel of systemic sexual, reproductive, and gender-based violence against Palestinians in Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the Human Rights Council an “anti-Israel circus” that “has long been exposed as an antisemitic, rotten, terrorist-supporting, and irrelevant body.”

Israeli rights group B’Tselem put forward a report in August of 2024 outlining human rights abuses occurring in detention facilities against Palestinians. Most of the 55 detainees that were interviewed were being held without trial. According to their reporting, there is a “systemic, institutional policy focused on continual abuse and torture of all Palestinian prisoners held by Israel”.⁴⁹ After the release of the report, the IDF categorically denied any allegations of abuse through a spokesperson, noting that prisoners had the right to file a complaint. However, this denial was issued shortly after nine Israeli soldiers were detained by the IDF for alleged “severe sexual abuse” of a Palestinian man at a facility in the Negev desert.⁵⁰

This is important because it demonstrates a powerful example of SORVO in action: the Israeli military has accumulated enough power to categorically deny abuse while simultaneously acknowledging that nine of its members committed this atrocity. The military, government, and media have accumulated enough power to reject allegations while continuing to perpetuate the very sexual abuse they deny participating in. Reem Alsalem, UN special rapporteur on violence to women and girls, noted this exchange.⁵¹



We have received no reply, which is unfortunately standard behavior from the Israeli government who will not deal constructively with the special procedures or independent experts.

⁴⁹ Mackenzie, James. “Israeli Rights Group Says Palestinian Prisoners Subject to Systematic Abuse.” Reuters, August 6, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-rights-group-says-palestinian-prisoners-subject-systematic-abuse-2024-08-05/>.

⁵⁰ Mackenzie, James. “Israeli Rights Group Says Palestinian Prisoners Subject to Systematic Abuse.” Reuters, August 6, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-rights-group-says-palestinian-prisoners-subject-systematic-abuse-2024-08-05/>.

⁵¹ “Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.” n.d. ohchr. Accessed April 18, 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-violence-against-women>.

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There have been numerous reports of an escalation in sexual violence against Palestinian women and girls in Gaza since October 7th, 2023.⁵² Women who are detained by the IDF report stories with similar elements: arrests without charges, beatings, strip searches, rape threats, rape, and being photographed naked.⁵³ The Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), an advocacy group based in the West Bank, has noted that Israeli soldiers might feel emboldened to commit atrocities against Palestinians because of western media’s coverage of October 7th that alleged a “mass rape” occurred against Israelis.

The WCLAC also reported that Israeli soldiers are aware of the cultural stigma that prevents Palestinian women from coming forward. Many of these atrocities are committed in detention facilities against women who have been stripped of their rights, their dignity, their bodily autonomy, any political power they might have held before the war, and aided by the influence and bias of Western media. This puts the IDF in a massive position of power to deny any allegations that do come forward.

Omit

Omitting wrongdoing from the public record is a common tactic to execute SORVO. One method frequently used by the Israeli government throughout this conflict is to redirect focus from the abuses they commit to another distraction. For example, after a video was leaked of a Palestinian detainee being tortured and sexually assaulted by Israeli soldiers, the finance minister of Israel, Bezalel

Smotrich, found a powerful way to distract the public. The video shows ten soldiers raping the detainee, who suffered severe injuries during the assault.

Smotrich redirected public attention to the person who leaked the video. He wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, demanding:

“an immediate criminal investigation to locate the leakers of the trending video that was intended to harm the reservists and that caused tremendous damage to Israel in the world and to exhaust the full severity of the law against them.”⁵⁴



Figure 11. A tweet on X shows the finance minister of Israel, Bezalel Smotrich, angry that the video of the rape was leaked and calls for punishment against those who leaked the video.

⁵² Killer, Kevin, and Kevin Killer. 2022. “A Call to Enter Politics Becomes a Lifelong Mission to Lift up Native Communities.” Prism. April 14, 2022. <https://prismreports.org/2025/03/04/palestinian-women-violence-israel-october-7/a>.

⁵³ Cheung, Kylie, and Kylie Cheung. 2025. “Palestinian Women Come Forward With Allegations of Increased Sexual Violence by Israeli Forces Since Oct. 7.” Prism. March 4, 2025. <https://prismreports.org/2025/03/04/palestinian-women-violence-israel-october-7/>.

⁵⁴ Simon Speakman Cordall, “‘Everything Is Legitimate’: Israeli Leaders Defend Soldiers Accused of Rape,” Al Jazeera, August 9, 2024, <https://aje.io/8v81xp>

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This is a form of omission because the abuse itself is superseded in the public discourse by the hunt for the video leaker.



ALJAZEERA

'Everything is legitimate': Israeli leaders defend soldiers accused of rape

Israeli society is divided over the arrest of 10 soldiers for the brutal gang rape of a Palestinian prisoner caught on video.

By **Simon Speakman Cordall**

9 Aug 2024

Figure 12. Also posted on Al Jazeera is an article in which Israeli leaders defend the soldiers who are accused of gang raping a Palestinian prisoner.

Either as a direct result of Smotrich’s actions or through a series of other propaganda tactics, public opinion in Israel became divided over how to respond to the video. While many were outraged about the abuse, others claimed the violence was justified. Many organized to protest any investigations into the incident, objecting to the arrest of the Israeli soldiers. Smotrich once again became involved, stating that the soldiers being questioned should be treated like heroes, not criminals.⁵⁵ Israel has also publicly stated that it will not comply with international investigations of war crimes – including sexual violence.⁵⁶

Israel’s interest in omitting any wrongdoing can also be exemplified by the barriers its government has put in place against international journalists from entering Gaza. Another factor in this is the death toll itself. Over 180 journalists have been killed in Gaza since October 7th, which is an unprecedented number in modern warfare.⁵⁷ In July of 2024, a van clearly labeled “press” was directly hit by an Israeli airstrike, killing two journalists who worked for Al Jazeera. The press organization stated, “the assassination of Ismail and Rami, while they were documenting the crimes of Israeli forces, underscores the urgent need for immediate legal action against the occupation forces to ensure that there is no impunity.”⁵⁸



ALJAZEERA

Israel’s war on Gaza deadliest conflict ever for journalists, says report

More journalists killed in Gaza than in both world wars, Vietnam, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan combined, says Costs of War project.

2 Apr 2025

Figure 13. Aljazeera published an article on April 2, 2025, citing a report which states that the war in Gaza is the deadliest war for journalists, on record, having at least 232 journalists, or members of the press, been killed since fighting broke out. Journalists are also prohibited from entering Gaza by the Israeli government.

⁵⁵ “Israeli Military Probe of Suspected Abuse of Palestinian Detainee Sparks Uproar,” Reuters, July 29, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-military-probes-suspected-abuse-palestinian-detainee-drawing-protests-2024-07-29/>.
⁵⁶ “Israel ‘will Not Co-Operate’ with ICC War Crimes Investigation,” BBC News, April 9, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56687437>.
⁵⁷ “Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War” Committee to Protect Journalists, December 13, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/12/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>.
⁵⁸ Kingsley, Patrick, Farnaz Fassihi, Adam Rasgon, Ronen Bergman, Ephrat Livni, Anushka Patil, Christiaan Triebert, et al. 2024. “Assassinations of Hezbollah and Hamas Leaders Stir Fears of Wider War.” The New York Times, August 1, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/07/31/world/israel-gaza-war-hamas-iran?searchResultPosition=108>.

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The SVPA's investigation into reporting of sexual violence-related incidents between October 7, 2023 and October 7, 2024 by the *New York Times* and *Politico* discovered an alarming lack of attention to this issue. Only two out of 65 analyzed articles mentioned journalists being banned or killed at all. This is significant because any reporting without access to the full story inside Gaza is either inherently incomplete or biased. News outlets have a responsibility to note this limited access to acknowledge that there are likely many events happening inside the Gaza Strip that will not be told because of this blockage and the systematic campaign of killing journalists.

Beyond this example of omission, over 50,000 civilians as of March 2025 have been killed.⁵⁹ These civilians could very well be victims or witnesses to abuses, including sexual violence, perpetrated by Israelis in the Gaza Strip. The high death toll can be understood through the lens of silencing victims and witnesses.

Omission by Israel is possible partly due to the vast nature of this conflict. Wartime is chaotic, and sexual violence can be used as a potential element of torture and abuse. Due to "security concerns", the flow of information is also siloed, leaving fewer checks on actions occurring in less visible spaces such as prisons, investigation rooms, interrogation facilities, and courtrooms.⁶⁰

In 2016, an IDF Civil Administration officer was convicted of repeatedly exploiting his

position of power to rape and coerce sexual acts from Palestinians. However, the case was put under a gag order and not made public until 2021.⁶¹ This demonstrates that the project of omitting instances of sexual violence— particularly sexual violence perpetrated by the state— has been common practice for a long time.

Erase

Israel erases any evidence of sexual violence perpetrated against Palestinians by destroying evidence, killing witnesses, silencing reporters, and discrediting any reports that do come forward. In December of 2024, the US State Department received credible evidence from a Palestinian charity organization that a 13-year-old Palestinian boy had been raped while in detention. When the State Department reported this to the Israeli government, the IDF was quick to respond. Rather than investigating the charge, the IDF declared the charity a terrorist organization. Soldiers raided its offices and seized its computers, crippling the organization's ability to operate. This demonstrates the variety of tools the Israeli government uses to advance its agenda. The erasure of the assault from any public record was followed by a retaliatory campaign that not only served to discredit the charity but also rendered it unable to do the important work of reporting assaults.⁶³

The Israeli government also shut down the operations of Al Jazeera in May of 2024 in

⁵⁹ "50,000 killed in Gaza since start of Israel-Hamas war, health ministry says." 2025. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/23/middleeast/50-000-killed-in-gaza-since-start-of-israel-hamas-war-intl/index.html>.

⁶⁰ Madar, Revital. 2023. "Beyond Male Israeli Soldiers, Palestinian Women, Rape, and War." *Conflict and Society* 9 (1): 72–88. <https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2023.090105>.

⁶¹ "IDF Removes Gag on 2016 Conviction of Officer for Raping Palestinian Woman | the Times of Israel." 2021. The Times of Israel. October 20, 2021. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ending-censorship-idf-admits-officer-jailed-in-2017-raped-a-palestinian-woman/>.

⁶² Heidi Matthews and Tanya Serisier, "Bombing Gaza Isn't Fighting Sexual Violence," Counterpunch, January 16, 2024, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/01/16/bombing-gaza-isnt-fighting-sexual-violence/>.

⁶³ Heidi Matthews and Tanya Serisier, "Bombing Gaza Isn't Fighting Sexual Violence," Counterpunch, January 16, 2024, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/01/16/bombing-gaza-isnt-fighting-sexual-violence/>.

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Israel, claiming the news organization was a threat to national security.⁶⁴ This was following the passage of a law by the Knesset – the Israeli Parliament – on April 1st, giving senior ministers the power to “temporarily shut foreign news networks that they deem a security risk”.⁶⁵ This initial ruling laid the groundwork for the shutdown of Al Jazeera a

month later with the unfounded claim that it was being used as a propaganda tool for Hamas.⁶⁶ Netanyahu was quoted as saying: “Al Jazeera reporters harmed Israel’s security and incited against IDF soldiers. It is time to expel the mouthpiece of Hamas from our country.”⁶⁷ To shut down the news organization, the Israeli Ministry of Communication closed Al Jazeera’s offices, confiscated equipment, stopped cable and satellite broadcasts, and blocked access to its websites.

jns

Israel rejects UN report accusing IDF of genocide, sexual violence in Gaza

Jerusalem’s permanent mission to the United Nations in Geneva called the allegations unfounded, biased and lacking credibility.

JNS STAFF

(March 13, 2025 / JNS)

Figure 14. On March 13, 2025 the Jewish News syndicate published an article discussing the UN report, which “[accused] the IDF of genocide, [and] sexual violence in Gaza”. It reports that “Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the U.N.’s Human Rights Council as an “antisemitic, corrupt, terrorist-supporting and irrelevant body.”

The State Department employee and the silencing of Al Jazeera are only two examples of a broader campaign of erasure by the Israeli government. Since the beginning of the conflict, foreign reporters have been banned from entering Gaza altogether.⁶⁸ Only the Palestinian reporters and foreign journalists already in Gaza have been able to get news to the rest of the world. The deadliness of this war for journalists and other members of the press is relevant as a tact of omission as well as erasure. Omission describes instances that were never covered, and erasure describes instances that were completely removed from the record.

In December of 2024, an airstrike killed five journalists in a van clearly marked “press” outside of a hospital in Nuseirat Refugee Camp.⁶⁹ The IDF claimed responsibility for the airstrike, saying that it had conducted “a precise strike on a vehicle with an Islamic jihad terrorist cell in the area of Nuseirat.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Vicky Wong, “Al Jazeera Office Raided as Israel Takes Channel Off Air,” BBC News, May 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68961753>.

⁶⁵ “Knesset Passes a Law That Could Shut down Al Jazeera in Israel,” Al Jazeera, April 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/4/1/knesset-passes-a-law-that-could-shutdown-al-jazeera-in-israel>.

⁶⁶ Vicky Wong, “Al Jazeera Office Raided as Israel Takes Channel Off Air,” BBC News, May 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68961753>.

⁶⁷ Michael Schwartz et al., “Israel Orders Shut down of Al Jazeera in the Country, Seizes Equipment, in ‘Dark Day for Democracy,’” CNN World, May 6, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/05/middleeast/israel-al-jazeera-closure-intl/index.html>.

⁶⁸ “With so Many Stories Remaining Untold, Ban of International Journalists From Gaza Suffocates Truth, Secretary-General Tells Media Seminar on Peace in Middle East | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” 2024. November 1, 2024. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22436.doc.htm>.

⁶⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists. 2025. “Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War.” April 16, 2025. <https://cpj.org/2025/02/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/#:~:text=As%20of%20February%205%2C%202025,began%20gathering%20data%20in%201992.>

⁷⁰ Begum, Thaslima. 2025. “In Gaza, a Press Vest Makes You a Target”: The Journalists Who Have Paid a Price for Reporting on the War.” The Guardian, January 17, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/17/in-gaza-a-press-vest-makes-you-a-target-the-journalists-who-have-paid-a-price-for-reporting-on-the-war>.

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The clear markings on the press van make this doubtful. The Committee to Protect Journalists pointed out that this is a war crime, noting, “The IDF has not provided any evidence for their accusations that the murdered journalists were engaged in militant activity. Israel has repeatedly made similar unproven claims without producing credible evidence.”⁷¹ Literally erasing journalists from existence is a profound and violent way to maintain a propagandist narrative.

De-define

The failure of Israel and many members of the global public to condemn sexual violence perpetrated against Palestinians is likely due in part to the SORVO tactic of “de-define”. Sexual violence perpetrated by the state, perpetrated against men and boys, and perpetrated under the guise of “security protocol” (such as strip searches) are often not viewed as sexual violence at all. This is an intentional strategy to de-define abuses.

Dr. Mohammed al Ran is a Palestinian-Bosnian man who headed the surgical unit at a hospital in Gaza. He was arrested when the IDF raided the building. Following his arrest, Israeli soldiers stripped him down to his underwear, blindfolded him, bound his wrists together, and threw him in the back of a truck on top of several other near-naked men before they were hauled off to a facility in the middle of the desert.⁷² He was found to



On being asked if it was legitimate “to insert a stick into a person’s rectum”, lawmaker Hanoch Milwidsky, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s ruling Likud party, responded: “If he is a Nukhba [Hamas militant], yes! Everything is legitimate to do! Everything!”

be clear of any Hamas ties after one week, but was held for 44 days. He described beatings and torture in the prison.⁷³

Following October 7, the Israeli parliament converted three prisons into detention centers for “suspected combatants” from Gaza. The facilities hold Palestinians under the Unlawful Combatants Law that allows Israel to hold people without an arrest warrant for 45 days before they are turned over to the formal prison system. In the case of Dr. al Ran, he was released after 44 days back into Gaza because he had no Hamas ties.

On May 11, 2024, three Israeli whistleblowers reported on the conditions at the detention facilities to CNN.⁷⁴ The reports included stories of detainees being stripped, blindfolded, and tortured.⁷⁵ The

⁷¹ Begum, Thaslima. 2025. “In Gaza, a Press Vest Makes You a Target”: The Journalists Who Have Paid a Price for Reporting on the War.” The Guardian, January 17, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/17/in-gaza-a-press-vest-makes-you-a-target-the-journalists-who-have-paid-a-price-for-reporting-on-the-war>.

⁷² Qiblawi, Tamara. 2024. “Strapped Down, Blindfolded, Held in Diapers: Israeli Whistleblowers Detail Abuse of Palestinians in Shadowy Detention Center.” CNN, May 11, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁷³ Qiblawi, Tamara. 2024. “Strapped Down, Blindfolded, Held in Diapers: Israeli Whistleblowers Detail Abuse of Palestinians in Shadowy Detention Center.” CNN, May 11, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁷⁴ “Israeli whistleblowers detail horror of shadowy detention facility for Palestinians.” 2024. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁷⁵ “Israeli whistleblowers detail horror of shadowy detention facility for Palestinians.” 2024. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

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whistleblowers were particularly concerned with the conditions in one of the field hospitals at the Sde Teiman Detention Center for the Palestinians who were injured.

According to these accounts, the patients are stripped, put in diapers, and strapped down to beds:



“If you imagine yourself being unable to move, being unable to see what’s going on, and being completely naked, that leaves you completely exposed,” the source said. “I think that’s something that borders on, if not crosses to, psychological torture.”⁷⁶ CNN, May 11, 2024.



The same whistleblower recounted witnessing an amputation of someone’s arm because they had gotten an infection from the tight zip ties around their wrists.⁷⁷

The conditions at Sde Teiman detention facility are kept secret by the Israeli government. They have repeatedly denied access to journalists, human rights investigative bodies, and others, keeping secret the number of detainees or the whereabouts of the Palestinians held there.⁷⁸ Furthermore, staff are encouraged not to sign

medical reports so there is no record of the authorities committing these actions.⁷⁹

This insistence on secrecy underscores the threat that detainees might be facing, considering the lack of witnesses. Stripping people of their clothing, binding them to their beds, and forcing them to endure torture under these conditions is state-sanctioned sexual violence.

De-defining sexual violence also has a profound impact on women and gender nonconforming individuals in this context. Heart to Grow put forward a report entitled “Gendered Islamophobia” describing these distinct forms of racism and sexism. Gendered Islamophobia is “gendered forms of violence that are inflicted on Muslim bodies including the use of sexual violence, torture, harassment, murder, and state reproductive control, coercion, and violence.”⁸⁰

Reproductive and sexual control over Palestinian women has existed long before October 7th, with a United Nations Population Fund report noting that 94,000 women and girls lacked access to basic sexual and reproductive health care in 2023.⁸¹ After October 7, that figure rose to over 1 million over the course of the first five months of the conflict.⁸² This is an expanding issue and a clear case of state level Gendered Islamophobia.⁸³

⁷⁶ “Israeli whistleblowers detail horror of shadowy detention facility for Palestinians.” 2024. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁷⁷ “Israeli whistleblowers detail horror of shadowy detention facility for Palestinians.” 2024. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁷⁸ “Israeli whistleblowers detail horror of shadowy detention facility for Palestinians.” 2024. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁷⁹ Qiblawi, Tamara. 2024. “Strapped Down, Blindfolded, Held in Diapers: Israeli Whistleblowers Detail Abuse of Palestinians in Shadowy Detention Center.” CNN, May 11, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁸⁰ Hearttogrow. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://hearttogrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-GI-Report.pdf>.

⁸¹ “The Forgotten Women and Girls in Gaza: A Sexual and Reproductive Health Catastrophe - Occupied Palestinian Territory.” 2024. ReliefWeb. February 29, 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/forgotten-women-and-girls-gaza-sexual-and-reproductive-health-catastrophe>.

⁸² “The Forgotten Women and Girls in Gaza: A Sexual and Reproductive Health Catastrophe - Occupied Palestinian Territory.” 2024. ReliefWeb. February 29, 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/forgotten-women-and-girls-gaza-sexual-and-reproductive-health-catastrophe>.

⁸³ Hearttogrow. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://hearttogrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-GI-Report.pdf>.

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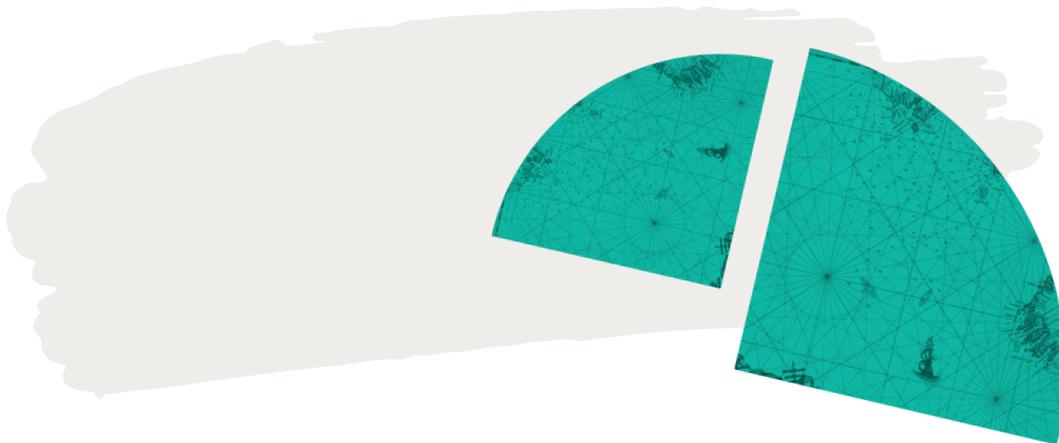
The UN High Commission on Human Rights made a statement in February of 2024 regarding the treatment of Palestinian women and girls in Israeli detention, stating:



“We are particularly distressed by reports that Palestinian women and girls in detention have also been subjected to multiple forms of sexual assault, such as being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli army officers. At least two female Palestinian detainees were reportedly raped while others were reportedly threatened with rape and sexual violence.”
February 19, 2024.



There have also been reports of Israeli soldiers photographing female detainees in degrading circumstances and uploading the images online.⁸⁴ Depriving Palestinian women of their safety and dignity is rooted in gendered Islamophobia.⁸⁵ This framework describes the dichotomy between depicting Muslim women as terrorists and terrorist sympathizers while simultaneously inherently oppressed within their own communities.⁸⁶ Both of these racist tropes take agency away from Muslim women and girls. This is intentional because sexual violence perpetrated against them is then de-defined, or is less likely called sexual violence explicitly.

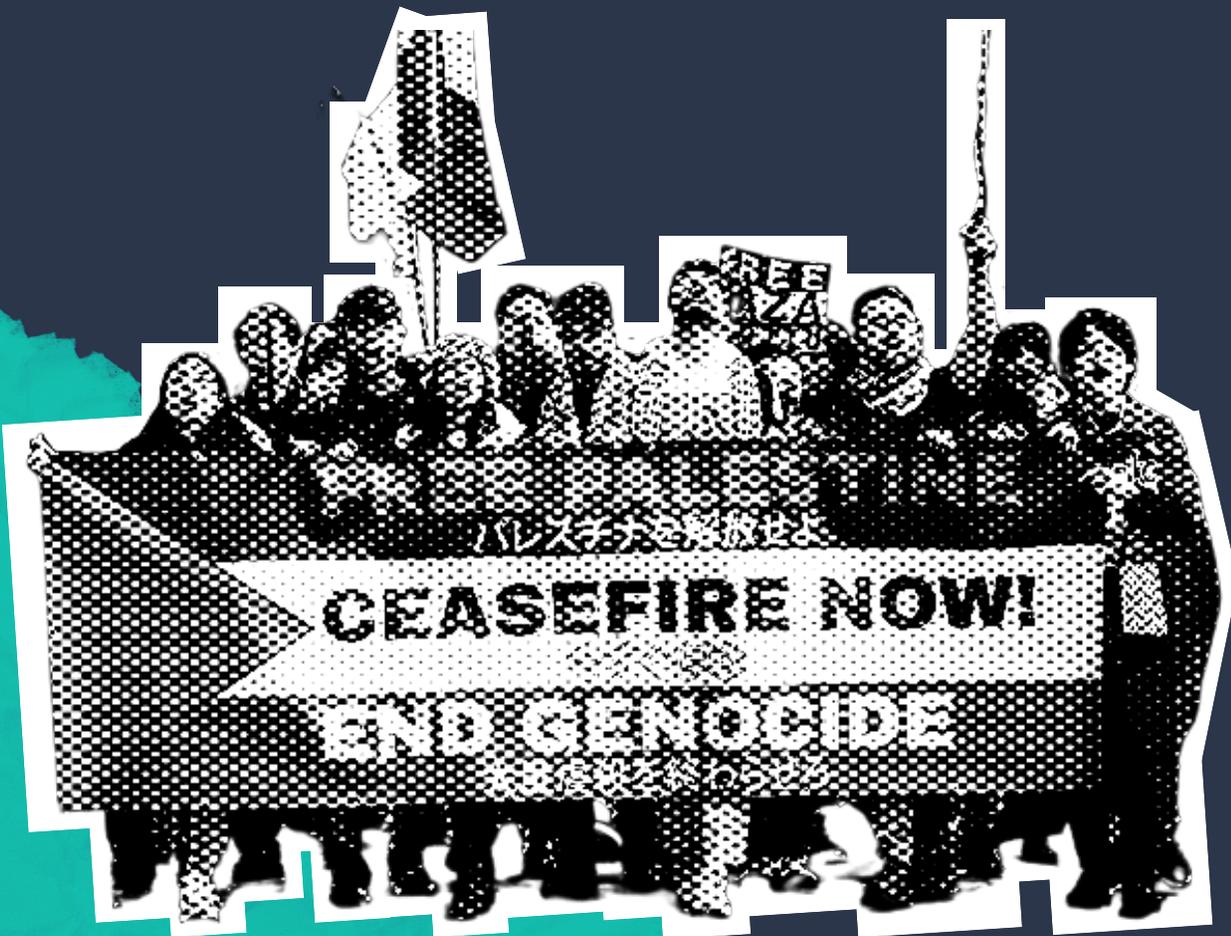


⁸⁴ OHCHR. n.d. “Israel/oPt: UN Experts Appalled by Reported Human Rights Violations Against Palestinian Women and Girls.” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>.

⁸⁵ Hearttogrow. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://hearttogrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-GI-Report.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Hearttogrow. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://hearttogrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-GI-Report.pdf>.

Conclusion



Conclusion

The use of SORVO by Israel to justify the oppression of Palestinians has been ongoing for decades, but the events of October 7th have garnered global attention and sympathy for their oppression. With the eyes of the world on Gaza, Israeli leadership relentlessly refers to sexual violence committed by Hamas on that day to justify the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. By exaggerating, sensationalizing, redefining, and falsifying accounts of sexual violence, Israeli leadership has used the media and global political allies to further a narrative that all Palestinians should be subject to collective punishment.

Simultaneously, Israel commits sexual violence at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels against Palestinians. But by denying, omitting, erasing, and de-defining these instances, they have kept themselves largely out of public scrutiny. This is about power dynamics, because only through manipulation of the media and world leaders can the oppressor use SORVO to justify their oppression. This conflict is ongoing, and Israel continues to create a false narrative that reverses victim and offender to realize this genocide.



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