Protesters denounce UN Women’s silence on female hostages in Gaza

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<https://www.jns.org/protesters-denounce-un-womens-silence-on-female-hostages-in-gaza/>

Some 80 people gathered outside of the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City on Monday morning to demand that U.N. Women take action for female hostages in Gaza.

Dana Cwaigrach, co-director of the New York branch of the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, which organized the gathering, told JNS that the protest marked International Women Human Rights Defenders Day on Nov. 29 and highlighted the inaction of U.N. Women, which is part of the global body.

‘The United Nations can condemn and acknowledge what Hamas has done to female hostages in Gaza,’ Cwaigrach said. ‘U.N. Women has not said a single thing—not the organization, not the executive director, have made a single statement about what happened on Oct. 7 and about the fact that there are still 13 women held hostage in Gaza who are enduring sexual threats every day.’

‘We know for certain there was sexual violence that occurred during captivity, and U.N. Women has done absolutely nothing,’ she added.

U.N. Women commented publicly last December about the [right](https://twitter.com/UN_Women/status/1730780060947296681) of Israeli women, among others, to live in safety free of violence and about ‘[accounts](https://twitter.com/UN_Women/status/1730780305085149304) of gender-based atrocities and sexual violence’ during the Oct. 7 attacks.

Liana Weinstein, a relative of Israeli hostage Arbel Yehoud, who was abducted from her home in Kibbutz Nir Oz on Oct. 7, told attendees that they must continue to call on international organizations to advocate for Israeli women.

‘We are gathered here because [silence](https://www.jns.org/sheryl-sandberg-un-silence-unacceptable-for-israeli-women-all-women/) is not an option right now, when at this very moment women in Gaza are enduring unspeakable horror, abuse, starvation and deprivation of their very humanity,’ she said.

After several chants of ‘bring them home,’ protesters held a moment of silence for Omer Neutra, a Long Island native and lone soldier. Israel [said](https://www.jns.org/idf-officer-believed-to-be-alive-in-gaza-was-killed-on-oct-7/) on Monday that Neutra, whose body remains in Gaza, was killed on Oct. 7.

Cwaigrach told JNS that news of Neutra’s death was a devastating blow to the New York Jewish community.

‘This is a very difficult day,’ she said. ‘Omer was a Long Island native, and his entire family has been part of our efforts to advocate for the hostages since day one. Just yesterday, they were at our weekly protest in Central Park optimistic that their son might return through a negotiated deal.’

‘We will continue to stand by their side as their son’s body is still held hostage,’ she said.

Orna Simkhai, a resident of Manhattan and a dual Israeli-American citizen, told JNS that she joined the protest because she cannot relax as Israelis remain captives in Gaza.

‘I’m not going to celebrate life until all the hostages are home,’ she said. ‘It’s very important for our voice to be heard as women in the United States. We need to do something to help.’

Daniella Abbott of San Diego told JNS that she joined the demonstration to express her disappointment in the lack of U.N. action in helping to free the hostages.

‘It’s important, as a non-governmental organization, to be talking about things in a nonpartisan way, which is just not what the U.N. has been doing,’ she said.

‘This is not a political issue,’ she added. ‘It’s about people wanting to go home to their family, whether alive or dead at this point, which is horrible and unfortunate, but you can still speak up. It’s not too late.’