Pleading for his release, mother says hostage Alon Ohel is wounded, chained in Hamas tunnels

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<http://timesofisrael.com/hostage-alon-ohel-is-alive-but-wounded-held-chained-in-tunnels-family-says/>

In a heart-wrenching television interview on Sunday, Idit Ohel, the mother of hostage Alon Ohel, pleaded desperately for his release “tomorrow,” saying she had just been told that he is being held starving in chains in a Hamas tunnel and has multiple untreated injuries.

She urged the whole nation, and the entire world, to insist upon and enable his release and to come out and demonstrate on Monday as he marks his 24th birthday, his second in Hamas captivity.

Idit Ohel told Channel 12 that released hostages Eli Sharabi and Or Levy were held with her son for the duration of their captivity. Their return from Gaza on Saturday was the first time that Ohel’s family received confirmation that he is still alive since he was abducted 492 days ago from the Nova music festival.

“He has shrapnel in his eye, he has shrapnel in his shoulder, he has shrapnel in his arm. Alon was bound in chains, this entire time, and he had almost no food — at most one pita a day, over a very, very, very long time, more than a year,” an anguished Idit Ohel told Channel 12.

“And not just him — everyone who was with him: Or Levy and Eli Sharabi,” she said, naming two hostages who were [released on Saturday](https://www.timesofisrael.com/gaunt-and-frail-hostages-eli-sharabi-or-levy-and-ohad-ben-ami-freed-after-16-months/), visibly emaciated.

“I can’t understand it. I don’t think there’s a single mother who could handle her son being hungry, hungry for food, and held in chains for so many days,” she said, breaking down into tears. “I just got this information,” she wailed.

She said that “everything you can see that Eli and Or went through, Alon is now experiencing.” She also said that, according to what she’s heard, her son has not received treatment for his injuries, and can only see shadows out of his wounded eye.

Hamas terrorists abducted Ohel — a then-22-year-old pianist with plans to study jazz in Tel Aviv — alongside Or Levy and [Eliya Cohen](https://www.timesofisrael.com/taken-captive-eliya-cohen-dragged-from-a-pile-of-dead-bodies/), whom Hamas is still holding captive in Gaza. Also abducted from the same bomb shelter was [Hersh Goldberg-Polin](https://www.timesofisrael.com/we-all-failed-you-heartbreak-at-funeral-for-hersh-goldberg-polin-in-jerusalem/), who was murdered in Hamas captivity in August 2024.

The hostages released in the ongoing, first phase of the ceasefire are limited to those considered “humanitarian” — women, children, the elderly, and the wounded and sick. Ohel was not among those to be released in this phase and is only set to be freed as part of the second stage of the deal, pending further negotiations over a permanent ceasefire and full Israeli withdrawal from the Strip.

“What is this *selection*?” Ohel’s mother demanded, using a word with connotations of Nazi death camps. “How is Alon, in this condition, not considered ‘humanitarian’? How is he not here with me now, with Eli and Or? I don’t understand it, and I’ll never understand it.”

“I demand, demand, from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the cabinet, now, now, they must do everything to get Alon and everyone home. The men are suffering terribly,” she said.

Netanyahu has reportedly [declined to give Israeli negotiators a mandate](https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-negotiators-arrive-in-doha-sources-say-its-just-for-show-pm-aims-to-brick-deal/) to discuss the second phase of the deal, despite the passage of a deadline to begin those talks, and has appeared to keep the door open to a return to fighting — which right-wing elements of the coalition have urged — rather than the full implementation of the deal.

“I can’t fathom it. It doesn’t make sense,” Idit Ohel said, of the delegation’s lack of a mandate to carry the talks forward. Asked whether anyone from the government had reached out to her, she said no.

The mother added, “We know that Alon is strong. We know that he’s holding up. He’s from a long line of family — grandfathers and grandmothers who went through very difficult things in the Second World War. They also lost 30 kilos (66 pounds), and they survived, and started families. Alon has those roots. Alon has that inheritance. We know he’s strong.

“But we need our state. And we need the world to cry out and not allow this to continue. This is humanitarian! What you saw yesterday — that’s humanitarian!” she repeated.

“I hope that after today, after we received this sign of life and this information, and the testimonies of those who came out from there, particularly Eli and Or, I expect not only the prime minister, but everyone involved, to call me and tell me that Alon is being released tomorrow,” Idit Ohel shouted.

“Not that they’re not doing everything, but that *I know it is happening* — that phase two is happening. And he is meant to be in phase one, from what I see.

“What has been done here is shameful,” she said furiously. “This ‘selection’ — that the government of the State of Israel gave this list” of those who would be freed in phase one, first, as humanitarian cases, and only later in the still unfinalized phase two.

Idit Ohel told Ynet earlier on Sunday that the family still had not heard from Levy directly, but said she hopes to speak with him when he’s ready: “He needs to be with his family right now. He’s only learned just now that his wife was murdered. I want him to recover, and when the moment is right for him to speak about Alon, I would certainly love to listen, and to visit him.”

In a statement Sunday, released through the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, Ohel’s family said, “Today we were informed that since his kidnapping, Alon has been held in tunnels in Gaza alongside hostages who were recently released.

“While we are relieved and emotional to know Alon is alive, we are also devastated and shocked by his severe physical and mental condition, and by the abuse that he and the other hostages continue to endure,” the family said

“Alon has survived the horror so far, but he has no time left! The release of the hostages cannot be delayed. These are all humanitarian cases!”

On Monday, Ohel’s family will mark Alon’s 24th birthday at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv, and the family urged all who can make it to join them for the event.

“Alon will mark his second birthday in captivity tomorrow,” his mother said on Channel 12. “I ask, I demand, I pray — all the artists of Israel, the entire nation of Israel, come be with us, give us strength, give strength to Alon. Alon is a pianist, the country is full of pianists, come tomorrow and play the piano, send strength, send energy, send what he needs to survive this awful thing.

“Who can believe that Alon, now, as we are speaking, is chained and cannot move? The world has to turn upside down. The prime minister has to do everything so that Alon returns home. This is impossible any longer…. Every citizen has to go out [into the streets] tomorrow… all the energies have to be exerted.”

The hostage’s mother noted that, in addition to Alon’s upcoming birthday, the captive’s sister marked her own birthday on Saturday.

According to Idit, one of the released hostages delivered a happy birthday message from Alon upon his release. “It was very moving. And it’s an amazing gift for her to receive. We want the biggest gift of all, which is that Alon will come out.”

In their statement Sunday, the family called upon “the prime minister, the cabinet and the government of Israel,” saying, “time is running out.”

“We must advance the second stage of the deal and return all the hostages. Your moral obligation is to do everything you can to save Alon and the rest of the hostages,” the family said.

Seventy-three of the 251 hostages abducted by Hamas on October 7 remain in Gaza, including the bodies of at least 34 confirmed dead by the IDF.

Hamas has so far released 21 hostages — civilians, soldiers and Thai nationals — during a ceasefire that began in January. The terror group freed 105 civilians during a weeklong truce in late November 2023, and four hostages were released before that.

Eight hostages have been rescued by troops alive, and the bodies of 40 hostages have also been recovered, including three mistakenly killed by the Israeli military as they tried to escape their captors.

Hamas is also holding two Israeli civilians who entered the Strip in 2014 and 2015, as well as the body of an IDF soldier who was killed in 2014. The body of another IDF soldier, also killed in 2014, was recovered from Gaza in January.