38 Israeli families mourn while Hamas holds their loved ones’ remains

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<https://www.jns.org/38-israeli-families-mourn-while-hamas-holds-their-loved-ones-remains/>

Families of deceased hostages whose bodies are still being held by Hamas in Gaza carried an empty coffin through Jerusalem on Thursday to raise awareness of their plight and call for the return of their loved ones.

“I am attending this rally because we, the families of deceased hostages, are a unique group,” Ruby Chen, the father of American-Israeli dual citizen Sgt. Itay [Chen](https://www.jns.org/kidnapped-american-israeli-soldier-declared-dead-by-idf/), 19, told JNS on Thursday.

Itay, from Netanya, was stationed at the Nahal Oz army base as part of a tank unit when he was captured along with three other soldiers on Oct. 7. He was one of six hostages with U.S. citizenship thought to have still been alive in Gaza. The Israel Defense Forces declared him dead on March 12.

“We decided to organize an alternative service to highlight the fact that the State of Israel must do everything it can to bring all the hostages back, both the living and the deceased,” Ruby Chen said.

Hundreds of new families will be mourning on Yom Hazikaron: Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism, though some will not have anywhere to pay their respects.

“We do not have a burial site. If you ask me where I will be going on Monday, I can tell that I don’t have a good answer,” Chen told JNS. He will also be attending Saturday’s rally at Tel Aviv’s “Hostage Square,” which this week will focus on those declared dead in Gaza.

“I am calling on the people of Israel to join us. I am asking leaders and people worldwide to pray with us regardless of their religion so that we will be able to have closure and that our deceased will be buried in dignity,” Chen said.

According to the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, 38 families in Israel will be mourning while the remains of their loved ones are still held by Hamas in Gaza.

On Tuesday, Lior [Rudaeff](https://www.jns.org/presumed-hostage-lior-rudaeff-confirmed-dead/" \t "_blank) from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak was declared dead, exactly seven months after he was presumed to have been abducted by Hamas terrorists during the Oct. 7 onslaught.

Two more Israeli victims of Hamas’s [massacre](https://www.jns.org/two-more-israeli-victims-of-oct-7-declared-dead/) were declared dead late last week—Elyakim Libman, 23, a security guard at the Supernova music festival presumed to have been taken hostage, but whose body was found in Israeli territory, and Dror Or, 49, who was kidnapped to Gaza from Kibbutz Be’eri.

**‘The kids need something physical to understand’**

“My son was the first one to go out of his house in Kibbutz Nir Oz to protect his family; he cannot be the last one to come home,” Yael Adar, the mother of 38-year-old Tamir Adar, who was abducted by Hamas and declared dead in captivity, told JNS.

“It’s like I have an actual hole in my body. When you feel this way, all you want is to feel close to your loved one, but I have nowhere to go. It’s very difficult,” she said.

Tamir, 38, lived in Kibbutz [Nir Oz](https://www.jns.org/i-am-going-to-the-hague-to-speak-for-those-who-no-longer-can/) with his wife, Hadas, and two children, Neta, 4, and Asaf, 8. On Oct. 7, he woke up to the sound of rocket warning sirens and entered the house’s safe room with his family. About half an hour later, Tamir realized that terrorists had infiltrated the community and he left to fend off the attack. He was wounded, kidnapped into Gaza and confirmed dead 90 days later.

“Tamir has two children. We told them he died; we didn’t tell them that he was murdered. On Oct. 7, he just disappeared, he went out and did not say goodbye. He did not come back. The kids need something physical to understand, they need a place to go to and speak to their father,” Yael said.

“I have to keep hope all the time because I can’t give up on him. I really don’t know if there will be a deal or when my son will come back. It could take months or maybe more,” she added.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin [Netanyahu](https://www.jns.org/netanyahu-talks-hostage-negotiations-with-visiting-cia-chief/) on Wednesday hosted CIA Director William Burns for talks on the ongoing indirect hostage negotiations with Hamas.

It came after the Israel Defense Forces launched a limited military operation in eastern Rafah shortly after [Hamas](https://www.jns.org/hamas-quits-ceasefire-talks-in-cairo/) claimed it had accepted a ceasefire deal, in what Israeli officials described as “an exercise by the terrorist group meant to present Israel as the refuser.”

Netanyahu reiterated on Tuesday that the terms proposed by Hamas, which Egypt and Qatar devised without consulting with Jerusalem, are still “very far” from what his War Cabinet deems acceptable.

**‘We do not intend to receive a fifth coffin’**

Sharon [Sharabi](https://www.jns.org/captives-loved-ones-plead-for-their-release-at-tel-aviv-rally/), whose brothers Eli and Yossi were kidnapped on Oct. 7, and whose brother Yossi was since declared dead, will be attending a ceremony on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem on Memorial Day, which begins at sundown on May 12.

“I wake up in the morning with hope that it will be the day that we succeed in bringing both of my brothers home. For me, every day is Remembrance Day. It’s been 216 days that are all memorial days,” Sharabi told JNS.

“For my brother Yossi, time has run out, we lost him in captivity. We will be unable to begin mourning until the day we succeed in bringing his remains back home to be buried according to Jewish law. It is our commitment to all the hostages, the deceased and those who are still alive,” he said.

After visiting Mount Herzl, Sharabi will go to Moshav Kfar Harif, southeast of Ashdod, where Eli’s wife and two daughters were buried after being murdered by Hamas on Oct. 7.

“I think I might be the only person of all the hostages’ families who met all 120 Israeli politicians [Knesset members]. I also met with U.S. President Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and addressed the U.K. parliament because Eli’s family is British,” Sharabi said.

“My message is that the Sharabi family has already lost four people. We do not intend to receive a fifth coffin,” he said.