Captivity survivor's chilling UN testimony

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Ilana Gritzewsky, survivor of Hamas captivity and partner of hostage Matan Zangauker, delivered an emotional testimony before the United Nations Security Council, recounting the horrors of her abduction and calling for urgent action to secure the release of all remaining hostages.

She described how “within minutes, our home in Nir Oz turned into hell. They dragged me, beat me, and humiliated me. On the streets of Gaza, I was forced to walk hand in hand with a terrorist as if I were his wife, so that they would not notice that I was kidnapped.”

Gritzewsky recalled the violence she endured: “They grabbed me by the hair, hit me in the stomach, causing me to lose my breath. They dragged me across the floor, lifted me, and threw me against the wall. They pointed guns at me, hit me, tried to film me with my phone. I raised my hands, told them I was Mexican, begged them not to hurt me, not to rape me, not to shoot me, just to let me go. The only thing I could think of was having my family see me end my life like this. The terrorists beat me, humiliated me, touched me all over, threw me on a motorcycle, and took me into Gaza.”

“On the way to Gaza, when they started to touch me and sexually abuse me, I passed out physically and mentally. I couldn't handle it anymore. I guess my body preferred to shut down. They kept beating me because, for them, I was a prize. I woke up in some ruined house, lying half-naked on rocks, surrounded by Hamas terrorists. I had to beg not to be raped, telling them I was on my period. At first, they didn’t understand if I was on my period or pregnant, but nevertheless, that made them leave me alone. They threw a hijab and a dress at me and ordered me to get dressed. I didn’t know exactly what had been done to my body in those lost minutes when I wasn’t conscious. But my soul already knew: nothing would ever be the same. I was suffering from a fractured jaw, a broken pelvis, ear damage from the explosions, and a burned leg.”

For 55 days, she lived in captivity. “I slept on the floor, hungry, sick, and without medicine. I lost 12 kilos. The terrorists ate meat, rice, and vegetables, and we received ten grains of hummus or a piece of dry pita. While the world talks about hunger in Gaza, we, the kidnapped, are the ones who were starved and are still starving on purpose.” She explained further: “They did not give me any medicine, no doctor came to see me, even though I told them I was suffering from colitis and anemia. The terrorists dictated everything: when we could talk, when we could go to the bathroom, when we could get up. They woke us up in the middle of the night for cruel interrogations. From the moment I was captured, the guards were with me all the time. They did not wear Hamas uniforms. They dressed like civilians. They told me that one of them is a math teacher and the other one is a lawyer. For 50 days, they made sure I could not escape. They told us all the time that we would be hostages for five, or even ten years.”

“When it was time to eat, they took a lot of food to their room. They had meat, rice, vegetables. At the same time, they left us with our meal, which contained sometimes as little as 10 chick peas or a piece of dry flat bread, which wasn’t always well-cooked.”

She recalled being taken to Nasser Hospital through a back entrance. “They transferred us to a hospital, now I know it was the Nasser hospital. They took us through the back entrance and walked us past all the civilians. In the hospital, there was an area that was closed off and used only by Hamas, with an armed guard. They locked us in a room, where we met a third hostage.”

Speaking of her partner Matan, she said: “In the tunnel, I discovered that Matan was a short distance from me the whole time but they didn't let me see him. I refused to be released because I wanted to stay by his side. I left Gaza with a hole in my heart and a promise: to do everything to bring him and the other hostages home.”

“So, I left with a hole in my heart. I promised my friends I would do everything in my power to bring them home. And now, I am keeping that promise. People see my face and think I'm ‘free’. But freedom is not a switch you can turn on and off. Trauma doesn't vanish once you're released. Now, with every siren, every rocket from Iran, Yemen or Gaza, I'm thrown back into that hell. The difference is: I have a safe room. Matan doesn't. He's still in Gaza.”

“I’m here not just for myself, but for every woman and man who didn’t make it home. For every voice that was ignored. For the 50 hostages still in Gaza. For their families. I’m calling on human rights groups, and everyone who claims to care: Stand with us. Speak up. Demand the truth. Because silence is betrayal.”

She urged the Council: “Do not turn away. Do not look for excuses. Do not allow political divisions to silence the voices of victims. Use your influence, your power, your responsibility, to demand the unconditional release of every hostage. Not tomorrow. Not in some distant future. But now. We need to make a deal. Israeli citizens want this war to end. Bring them home. Bring Matan home. Bring all of them home. Only then I will be able to begin to heal. Only then can the hostages’ families begin to heal. Only then we will begin to believe again in the values that this Council was created to uphold.”

Following her testimony, Israel’s Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, said: “Ilana’s testimony is chilling and presents a clear picture to the Security Council: Hamas is abusing the hostages, starving them, and using international aid to feed the terrorists. The international community can no longer look away. Hamas must be defeated and the hostages must be released.”