

Israel: Hamas Committed Documented Atrocities. But a Few False Stories Feed the Deniers

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The extensive evidence of crimes against humanity committed by Hamas terrorists on October 7 should not be contaminated by unverified stories disseminated by Israeli search and rescue groups, army officers and even Sara Netanyahu

Warning: This article contains accounts that some readers might find disturbing.

Politicians, army officers, search-and-rescue volunteers and social-media activists have all provided testimonies about Hamas' atrocities on October 7. Most are supported by extensive evidence, but a few have been proved untrue, providing ammunition to deniers of the historic massacre.

Members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as other Gazans who entered Israel, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. They viciously murdered about 1,200 people, most of them unarmed civilians. They abducted about 240 people - both civilians and soldiers - including women and children, even a baby.

A variety of evidence is available on Hamas' cruelty, which includes the murder of parents in front of their children and children in front of their parents. There were sexual assaults, rapes and mutilations, while some victims were bound and some of the dead were desecrated. Some homes were burned with the people still inside.

None of this is in dispute. But some people have disseminated unverified information on the events that day.

Video The i24News news report. Watch from 26:06 not visible anymore.

According to a reporter for i24News, an army commander told her that at least 40 babies had been killed, some of them beheaded.

The channel said: "Reports of the atrocities and the estimated numbers are based on testimonies by officers who removed bodies from Gaza border communities." It said these accounts were collected during the IDF Spokesperson's Unit's tour for foreign correspondents four days into the war.

The station added: "Similar reports were repeated in testimonies by Zaka personnel. [Zaka is the ultra-Orthodox Jewish organization whose members retrieve bodies after terror attacks.] Our correspondents brought in the voices from the field; we interviewed the officers and reported from the scene, surrounded by atrocities from the vicious attack. We always act to ensure the accuracy of the details and add clarifications and corrections."

way to Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva because her contractions had begun. Terrorists shot her in the stomach. Later hospital staff delivered the baby girl, who died a few hours later.

According to the National Insurance Institute, five other children aged 6 or under were murdered, including Omer Kedem Siman Tov, 2, and his 6-year-old twin sisters Arbel and Shachar, who were killed on Kibbutz Nir Oz. There was also 5-year-old Yazan Zakaria Abu Jama from Arara in the southern Negev, who was killed in a Hamas rocket strike, and 5-year-old Eitan Kapshetar, who was murdered with his parents and his 8-year-old sister, Aline, near Sderot.

Photo: US President Joe Biden meets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv, Israel, on October 18, 2023. Credit: EyePress News via Reuters Connect

Fourteen children aged 12 to 15 were killed in Israel in rocket strikes launched from Gaza, not at massacre sites in southern Israeli communities. Most of the other children who were murdered were killed in or near their homes, usually with other family members.

There is no evidence that children from several families were murdered together, rendering inaccurate Netanyahu's remark to U.S. President Joe Biden that Hamas terrorists "took dozens of children, tied them up, burned them and executed them." Still, there were many bound bodies. According to people from Zaka and another search-and-rescue organization, United Hatzalah, there were bound bodies but the number is not known.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit does not deny that Lt. Col. Buskila's remarks about babies strung up on clotheslines do not jibe with reality. It said: "The officer serves as a reservist operations officer. He arrived at a large number of scenes after the attack and saw many difficult sights as part of his duties. The details of the incident will be clarified with the officer, and it will be made clear to him that he should not describe events whose details are unclear and unofficial."

An i24News news report with testimonies of ZAKA personnel. Watch from 4:38

As for Col. Vach's remarks on the bodies of eight burned babies, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit said he "described difficult sights that he saw during his various missions evacuating bodies at the start of the war. The review was conducted in English, and the officer used the word 'babies' to describe a number of children's bodies that were found. The error was made in good faith and does not mitigate the severity of the atrocities committed."

Some of the incorrect descriptions were made by Zaka personnel; one repeatedly talked about 20 bound and burned bodies of children at a kibbutz.

He told Haaretz that these were boys and girls between 10 and 15 found behind Kibbutz Kfar Azza's dining hall. Elsewhere, he said he saw 20 children from Kibbutz Be'eri laid next to each other and burned to death with their hands bound.

Video

This description does not conform to the list of the dead. The teenagers murdered on Kfar Azza were Yiftach Kutz, 14, and his brother, Yonatan, 16. Their sister, Rotem, an 18-year-old soldier, was murdered with them. Nine minors were murdered at Be'eri; at least some of them were with their parents and killed in their homes, so it is possible that 20 bodies were all in one place.

Most of the murdered children were in the company of at least one parent in or next to their homes. One case that sounds similar to the description by the Zaka member occurred not on Kfar Azza but behind the dining hall at Be'eri, where dozens of Hamas terrorists held 15 Israelis in and around the



The letter the prime minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu, sent U.S. First Lady Dr. Jill Biden. Zaka said: "The volunteers are not pathology experts and do not have the professional tools to identify a murdered person and his age, or declare how he was murdered, except for eyewitness testimony."

As for the pregnant woman, Zaka said that due to the condition of the bodies when they were found, the volunteers might have misinterpreted what they saw.

In another story that spread a few weeks ago, United Hatzalah President Eli Beer told of a baby that was placed in an oven and burned to death. Beer made the remarks at a donors conference in the United States. The British newspaper The Daily Mail changed it from "baby" to "babies."

But this story also is not true. Ten-month-old Mila Cohen was murdered in the massacre, along with the baby still in the womb of her mother who died after her mother was shot on the way to hospital. The police have no evidence showing that other babies were killed. A source at United Hatzalah said a volunteer mistakenly interpreted a case at the Shura base and passed the inaccuracy on to Beer.

Another doubtful claim was made by the prime minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu, in a letter to U.S. First Lady Jill Biden. Sara Netanyahu wrote that one of the women was in her ninth month of pregnancy when she was abducted into Gaza, where she gave birth. People on social media published a photo of the hostage, Nutthawaree Munkan, a Thai citizen.

In a magazine interview, her friends, employer and families denied that she was pregnant. Munkan was released over a week ago; she was not pregnant and had not given birth. The army currently has no information about an abducted pregnant woman, and defense officials consider the story an unsubstantiated rumor. The Prime Minister's Office did not respond.

Zaka responded: "Fifty-two days ago, Zaka volunteers went into the inferno [of October 7] with dedication under fire so that the dead could be respected. Out of respect for the dead, in 'routine' times Zaka volunteers take care not to photograph or describe the horrors they see, but this time, respect for the living required the volunteers to testify to prevent denial of the atrocity."

Zaka said that "the volunteers collected the remains of people who had been massacred, bound, burned and raped in ways that the soul cannot comprehend, under the terrible pressure of rocket barrages and gunfire from a few meters away.

"At Be'eri, the volunteers handled more than 100 bodies of the murdered and fallen, of whom 90

were members of the kibbutz. Since the start of the war, the volunteers have handled more than 1,000 bodies of the murdered and fallen. The work of the Zaka volunteers is to bring every person and drop of blood for burial.

“A terrible massacre was committed at the Gaza border kibbutzim that no one can deny, and Zaka volunteers are the people who dealt with the atrocities to bring the massacred people for burial.”

Nir Hasson, Liza Rozovsky

P.S.

• Haaretz. Dec 4, 2023:

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-04/ty-article-magazine/.premium/hamas-committed-documented-atrocities-but-a-few-false-stories-feed-the-deniers/0000018c-34f3-da74-afce-b5fbe24f0000>