

# Israel - 'We won't let them sabotage this': Hostage families fight to keep ceasefire alive

Tuesday 4 February 2025, by [ZIV Oren](#) (Date first published: 30 January 2025).

**Amid fears that Netanyahu will torpedo the deal, hostage families are escalating their protests — even appealing to the ICC to intervene.**

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On the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 24, when the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv was filled with Israelis rushing home for Shabbat, a group of hostages' family members set up a table in the middle of the road. Complete with a white tablecloth, challah, wine, and candles, the Shabbat table was then set ablaze by the activists — members of the protest group "Sha'ar Begin," named for the site outside the Israeli military headquarters in central Tel Aviv where they have regularly demonstrated in support of a hostage deal. The family members, along with a few dozen supporters, blocked traffic while holding photos of their loved ones who have been in Gaza for nearly 500 days.



*Einav Zangauker, at the Shabbat demonstration on the Tel Aviv highway calling to release all the hostages, January 24, 2025. (Oren Ziv)*

The protest was deliberately timed to take place a day before the scheduled release of four female Israeli army spotters, as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. It was led by families of hostages expected to be freed in later phases of the deal, who fear that Netanyahu will torpedo the agreement to secure his political survival.

Among the protesters on Friday was Yifat Kalderon, whose cousin Ofer Kalderon, along with his two children, were abducted from Nir Oz on October 7. While Ofer's children were freed as part of the previous deal in November 2023, he remains in captivity. "The concern isn't just about who will be released in the second phase, but also whether the first phase will even be completed," Kalderon told +972.

Kalderon's fears echoed those of many other families, fueled by [media reports](#) that the deal is unlikely to be fully implemented. The November 2023 truce collapsed after [Israel rejected](#) Hamas' proposal to release seven hostages — four women and children, along with the bodies of three

others — instead of the ten living hostages initially agreed upon. Now, anticipating a similar scenario, the families are intensifying their efforts to pressure the Israeli government by taking to the streets, and even by [appealing to international bodies](#).



*Yifat Kalderon, at the Shabbat demonstration on the Tel Aviv highway calling to release all the hostages, January 24, 2025. (Oren Ziv)*

“There’s constant, terrible tension and fear. I can’t breathe until I see him, assuming he’s alive, because I really don’t know,” Kalderon added. “Until I see him hugging his four children, I won’t sleep. And even then, I’ll keep fighting until everyone comes back.”

### **‘This is our victory image’**

In late 2024, the Sha’ar Begin families broke away from the “Hostage and Missing Families Forum” — the primary organization representing the hostages’ families, known for its subdued weekly vigils at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv. Frustrated by what they saw as Netanyahu and his right-wing allies’ deliberate obstruction of negotiations, the new group has employed more [confrontational tactics](#). Their protests often feature sharp criticism of the war, unwavering demands for an immediate agreement at any cost, and, at times, discussions of Israeli war crimes in Gaza — a perspective that remains exceptionally rare and contentious in Israeli public discourse.

The day after the Shabbat protest, members of the group gathered outside the military headquarters in Tel Aviv, where a large screen broadcast news of the four female soldiers arriving in Israeli hospitals ahead of their emotional reunification with their families.

One of the most prominent voices among the activist families is Einav Zangauker, whose son Matan was abducted from Kfar Aza. Addressing a crowd of several thousand, she declared, “As the mother of a hostage, seeing parents embrace their daughters returning from captivity — this is our victory image.”



*Families of hostages at a protest outside the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, January 25, 2025. (Oren Ziv)*

“The government abandoned them, and the prime minister has yet to publicly commit to fulfilling the agreement,” she noted. “We won’t let anyone sabotage this deal. We won’t let anyone stand between us and our loved ones. Matan, Mom is on her way to you.”

Another regular in the group’s weekly protests is Itzik Horn, whose two sons are still held in Gaza.

“Yair and Eitan have been held captive for 15 months now. [Yair] is on the list of those to be released in the first phase of the deal, and [Eitan] is not included,” he told +972. “My war is against Hamas, but sadly, it is also against the Israeli government: there are factions in the government — not just [Bezalet Smotrich’s] Religious Zionism party, but also [National Security Minister Itamar] Ben Gvir and extremists in Likud — who are incredibly dangerous, and may [sabotage the agreement](#) from within.”

“We’ve reached a point where we’re dependent on the president of the United States,” he added. “I truly hope he continues to pressure Netanyahu to release all the hostages.”

While acknowledging the Israeli public’s resistance to releasing Palestinian prisoners who committed violent attacks, Horn had a stark message for lawmakers. “I have a very simple suggestion for the Knesset members and ministers [who oppose the deal]: send your children to Gaza [to] get our children out, and then let’s see if you oppose the deal.”



*Itzik Horn (second from the right) and other hostage relatives speak to the media during a protest outside the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, January 25, 2025. (Oren Ziv)*

## **‘We’ll keep the pressure on Netanyahu everywhere’**

Yehuda Cohen, whose son Nimrod was [taken prisoner by Palestinian militants from a burning tank](#) near the Gaza border, has emerged as one of the most vocal critics of the government and the war among the hostages’ families. The complex, multi-phase structure of the current ceasefire agreement, he argues, is a feature rather than a bug. “The reason it’s convoluted and includes exit points is that if it were straightforward, the government wouldn’t be able to drag it out while sabotaging it along the way,” he told +972. “Back in November, it went too smoothly.”

But last weekend, Cohen did not join the protests in Tel Aviv with his fellow activists. Instead, he observed them from The Hague, where he met with Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) — a figure vilified by Israeli media and politicians for his successful push to issue [arrest warrants](#) against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes in Gaza.

“Netanyahu isn’t just committing war crimes against Palestinians in Gaza — he’s committing crimes against Israeli soldiers,” Cohen told the Knesset’s Constitution, Law and Justice Committee before leaving for the meeting with Khan. In response, Likud MK Eliyahu Revivo [yelled at Cohen, accusing him](#) of actions that would result in “his son rotting for many more years in Hamas’ dungeons.”

“The importance of the meeting [with Khan] is in its publicity,” Cohen explained. “I told him that, first, I support the investigation, not only into war crimes committed by the Palestinians, but also by Israeli [officials]. Extending the war unnecessarily, causing the deaths of hundreds of soldiers, thousands of injuries, and the murder and suffering of hostages — this justifies an investigation.”

Cohen, whose views are rarely heard in mainstream Israeli discourse, particularly from a father of a captured soldier, said that October 7 proved that there’s a need for a “deal at any cost” to release

the hostages. “The government and its systems failed [ahead of and on October 7], and they must pay the price. If that means releasing [Palestinian] prisoners, that’s their problem to deal with. As far as I’m concerned, Netanyahu should crawl to Gaza to secure the deal.”

*Yehuda Cohen (left) and other Israeli hostage families demonstrate outside the Israeli military headquarters to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> birthday of Nimrod Cohen, in Tel Aviv, July 15, 2024. (Itai Ron/Flash90)*

“People [in the hostages’ families movement] say, ‘There’s already a deal. Why go to the ICC? Let Netanyahu work quietly; we should encourage him,’” Cohen said. “But Netanyahu is not acting for positive reasons — it’s all about survival. Whether or not to proceed with the deal depends entirely on what, at that moment, would extend his tenure.”

Past experiences, Cohen explained, proved that Netanyahu can’t be trusted when it comes to following through on ceasefire agreements. “Ben Gvir himself admitted that Netanyahu [thwarted a deal in the past](#). We’ve known this all along. We need to ensure he cannot veer toward Ben Gvir or Smotrich. We’ll keep the pressure on Netanyahu everywhere, be it through Trump or the ICC.”

Cohen, who naturally sees the return of his son Nimrod as his main goal, emphasized that “in the narrowest sense, I want the return of all the hostages. But if you expand that, it’s about ending the war. And in the even broader sense, [it’s about] reaching a more stable and permanent solution [with the Palestinians]. We need to look at the other side. It can’t be that one side thrives while the other suffers.”

### **‘The deal’s collapse was a death sentence’**

It’s not only relatives of living Israeli hostages who are deeply concerned about the fate of the deal with Hamas. Shachar Mor, the nephew of Avraham Munder — whose body was retrieved from a tunnel in southern Gaza in August, along with those of five other hostages — and a relative of Roy Munder, who was murdered on October 7, is also actively involved in the weekly protests.



*Families of hostages protest outside the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, January 25, 2025. (Oren Ziv)*

“The only person in the Middle East — maybe in the world — who has an interest in dragging out the deal is Netanyahu,” Mor told +972, his voice hoarse after days of chanting slogans at protests. “Even Hamas has signaled that they could accelerate the process.”

“Netanyahu’s trick is always to delay, to buy another week or two and hope things change. Meanwhile, his extremist allies [in the government] exploit the situation in the West Bank,” he said. “It’s no coincidence that [Foreign Minister Israel] Katz [released Jewish administrative detainees](#) so they could go back to carrying out pogroms. They’re shifting attention to that arena. It’s all to sabotage the deal.”

According to Mor, the thwarting of previous agreements cost the lives of Avraham Munder and other hostages. “When my aunt [Ruti Munder] returned in the first deal [in November], only then was she

told [Avraham, her husband] was still alive. She had been sure he was dead. How did he even make it to Gaza? He could barely get to the bathroom without help.

“He survived 132 days in captivity — a 79-year-old man who could barely move, walking with a cane — until an Israeli pilot, flying an American plane, dropped an American bomb. He either died from the bomb itself or from the guards, who panicked and shot him. It’s likely the first option, but we’ll never know,” Mor said.

“The collapse of the deal last year was a death sentence for my uncle and others. We found out in hindsight. They blew up the deal — whether it was Hamas or Israel doesn’t matter. It cost my uncle his life.”

**Oren Ziv**

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## **P.S.**

- +972 Magazine. January 30, 2025:  
<https://www.972mag.com/palestinian-prisoner-release-celebration-west-bank/>
- Oren Ziv is a photojournalist, reporter for Local Call, and a founding member of the Activestills photography collective.
- Oren Ziv’s articles in +972 Magazine:  
<https://www.972mag.com/writer/orenziv/>
- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war – the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas’ murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel’s retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society’s growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment – but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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