



Statement on Hamas's Execution of 6 Israeli Hostages

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security forcefully condemns the execution of six Israeli hostages by Hamas militants hours before Israeli forces were to attempt a rescue operation over the weekend of 1 September 2024. The cruel murder of these young people is a terrible crime and only serves to further escalate an already catastrophic situation for Palestinians. Furthermore, Hamas's subsequent taunting of Israeli families by posting videos of their loved ones taken before their deaths betrays a cruel genocidal logic in which relationships of love and responsibility are instrumentalized to cause harm and to destroy the soul of the group.

According to Hamas's armed wing, up until recently its militants have been instructed to keep hostages alive. However, since the Israeli military operation to free hostages in June, Hamas militants have been under new directions, which appear to include the execution of hostages if there is indication that the IDF is planning an imminent rescue mission. In June, Israeli forces freed four hostages from Nuseirat in a large-scale operation that took the lives of 274 Palestinians and injured 700 more. While the rescue of four hostages during the June military operation bolstered Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's opposition to a ceasefire, it apparently also precipitated a shift in Hamas's calculations.

The bodies of the six slain hostages, Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Alexander Lobanov, Almog Sarusi, and Ori Danino, were discovered in a tunnel on August 31. Five of them were abducted at the Nova festival on 7 October and another was taken from a nearby farm the same day. The Israeli National Institute of Forensic Medicine reports that the six were executed by a shot to the back of the head.

Since news of the executions became available, a record number of Israelis – most news outlets place the number at 750,000 – have taken to the streets to protest Prime Minister Netanyahu's obstruction of the ceasefire negotiations that would have released the hostages being held by Hamas. Tragically, three of the six Israelis who were recently killed were on a list to be released

in the first phase of a ceasefire agreed to in July, the implementation of which Netanyahu has delayed due to his insistence that Israel be given control over the Philadelphi corridor at the Egyptian border with Gaza.

Mirroring Israel's genocidal form of argumentation, Abu Obaida, the spokesperson for Hamas's Al-Qassam Brigades, said Hamas holds Israeli families – non-combatants without power over the government – responsible for hostage deaths: “Netanyahu's insistence to free prisoners through military pressure, instead of sealing a deal, means they will be returned to their families in shrouds. Their families must choose whether they want them dead or alive.” Netanyahu frequently blames Hamas for Israel's carnage in Gaza. The families of the hostages bear no responsibility for the actions of their government, whose refusal to negotiate in good faith has contributed to this escalation on the part of Hamas. Similarly, Palestinians do not bear the responsibility for Hamas's actions.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security reminds leaders of Israel and Hamas that they are fully responsible for their actions. We remind Netanyahu specifically about the multiple opportunities for the safe return of the hostages that he has deliberately passed over. With their rhetoric, each side is now mirroring the other, asking “What do you expect?,” and the Israeli and Palestinian people are suffering the consequences. Arguments that blame the other side for murders undertaken by choice are a perversion of ethics and will certainly not stand up in a court of law. They also guarantee that this disaster will continue indefinitely.

Israel and Hamas must stop fighting this battle through the bodies of captive populations. The Lemkin Institute has forcefully called out the genocidal nature of much of Hamas's violence on 7 October as well as the clearly genocidal speech of Israeli authorities, the genocidal actions of Israel's political and military establishment, the genocidal tendencies within Israeli society, and the complicity of Western nations in genocide since October 7. We have also called attention to the genocidal patterns of the Israeli occupation of Palestine before 7 October.

However, we mourn the deaths of everyone in historical Palestine and recognize that the Palestinian and Israeli populations are now locked in a very brutal dynamic with existential dimensions. While Palestinians are facing a clear genocide by Israel, which is actively killing, displacing, torturing, humiliating, starving, and destroying Palestinian life not only in Gaza but also in the Occupied West Bank, the Israeli state and military are creating the conditions for growing global political and moral marginalization due to the almost unimaginable horrors that the government has unleashed since last fall – with the widespread support of the Israeli public. The Israeli public's support for genocide and occupation is making the country increasingly vulnerable to retaliatory violence.

As 750,000 Israeli protesters have been facing state violence for opposing Netanyahu's continuing refusal to sign a ceasefire agreement, as parents of hostages, like Rachel

Goldberg-Polin, call for a ceasefire agreement, and as Palestinians courageously fight for their lives, lands, and freedom, the Lemkin Institute believes that there is a path forward for a real and sustainable peace, one that forefronts, transforms, and solves the right of return for Palestinians and guarantees security for Jews and other Israelis. It is the people of Palestine and Israel who must forge this peace together, beyond the control of state actors who profit from their harm and permanent insecurity.

The Western governments have shown disgusting cowardice and venality throughout the crisis, offering Prime Minister Netanyahu unlimited military and diplomatic support for genocide and thereby failing to bring any semblance of moderation or peacebuilding to the table. The United Nations is weak and unable to respond coherently, much less effectively. The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court are obstructed by politics. So it is up to the people of the world and the non-Western governments to help create a space in which transformation can begin.

We appeal to all leaders with courage and leverage to place coordinated pressure on Western nations, to clap back strongly against genocide, and to move towards a greater comity of nations in the Middle East and globally, throwing off the destructive patterns of the past 500 years. We appeal to citizens of all nations to continue to resist the dark path of death and destruction that we are currently on by standing up against genocide, by demanding that our leaders work tirelessly to prevent genocide, and by asking more from ourselves and our fellow human beings as we enter humanity's most difficult decades.