

An urgent call for the immediate release of Israeli hostages

The past few days have been harrowing for Israel. We are in shock at the greatest loss of civilian life since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.¹ Civilians—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—were massacred on a scale that is incomprehensible, in a calculated act of terror. Jewish families have been massacred in their homes, foreign agriculture workers have been slaughtered in the fields, hundreds of young people in a party were shot in the back while escaping,² and Bedouin children have been shot dead by Hamas militia. More than 3000 rockets hit Israel on Oct 7, 2023, alone,^{3,4} leading to an almost complete halt of normalcy and routine across many parts of the country.

The barbaric rampage was indiscriminate. Entire villages in the south of Israel have been decimated. Entire families were lost. This was the largest pogrom in 1 day against Jewish people since the Holocaust.⁵ It is a crime against humanity.

At least 900 people have been massacred; the count not final as not all the bodies have been located.¹ More than 2800 people were injured and maimed⁶—some will not survive their injuries, many will remain incapacitated, and all will be traumatised for life.

Currently, hospitals in Israel are on full alert and all physicians and medical personnel have been called upon. The health-care system in Israel has always been and will continue to be a model of co-existence for all—Jewish people, Muslims, Druze people, Christians—people of all faiths and ethnicities working together, caring for all human beings regardless of their nationality, identity, gender, religion, or political belief. This is our oath. These are our values.

More than 150 Israeli hostages have been taken—among them

whole families, toddlers without their parents, older people (including Holocaust survivors and frail people with dementia), and their foreign caregivers.⁷ Videos have emerged of bodies being mutilated on the streets of Gaza, of hostages paraded, humiliated, beaten in front of cheering crowds, of hostages tied and bound in abhorrent conditions, of Israeli children being hit by both Gazan adults and children.

We urgently call on the international medical community, a community that is committed to the preservation of human life, to condemn the savage massacre, to immediately call for guarantees for the safety and health of all those being kept hostage, and to unequivocally call for the immediate and unconditional return of our families and friends who have been cruelly taken hostage.

With prayers for safety and peace for all.

We declare no competing interests. This letter is co-signed by 1500 Israeli health-care professionals (appendix).

Editorial note: The Lancet Group takes a neutral position with respect to territorial claims in published text and institutional affiliations.

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- 1 The White House. Remarks by President Biden on the terrorist attacks in Israel. Oct 10, 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-terrorist-attacks-in-israel-2/> (accessed Oct 11, 2023).
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