

The women's movement has abandoned Israeli rape victims

AMY NEUSTEIN | GUEST CONTRIBUTOR



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Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CNN's Jake Tapper on Dec. 10 the "sexual violence that we saw on Oct. 7 is beyond anything I've seen." When asked why the United Nations and the international community have been so slow to show support for the victims, Blinken responded, "I think it is a question that these organizations ... need to ask themselves."

During a special panel hosted by Israel on Dec. 4 at the U.N. headquarters in New York, we learned more details about the brutalities meted out on Israeli women and girls during the Hamas rampage on kibbutzim and towns along the Gaza border.

These are the very brutalities that have been met with dismissiveness from U.N. Women, a human rights group, and the women's movement writ large.

Those who spoke on the panel pointed out that Israeli police investigators, rape crisis centers and forensic medical examiners have been abundantly clear in describing the horrors of sexual violence perpetrated against Israeli women and girls on Oct. 7.

There are 1,500 eyewitness statements, detailed pathology reports and ample video recordings. The findings are unsparingly gruesome. Women were shot in the face while being gang-raped. Pregnant women were raped and disemboweled, and their fetuses dismembered. Nails and other rusty metal

objects were found inside the genitals of women who were mutilated and murdered.

Sadly, this litany of horror has still not been enough to elicit rage from the women's movement that has prided itself as defenders of the #MeToo campaign, which is supposed to show unconditional support for all victims of sexual violence.

The lack of response has made it perfectly clear to Jewish girls and women just how alone they truly are. Jewish men, enraged over the brutal assaults, have likewise felt the betrayal of the global community. Many Jews, aside from the collective support of one another, know that they stand alone in their pain, anguish and grief, as they have for thousands of years.

At this critical time, we sorely need the support of the women's movement to validate our outrage and to publicly decry the violation of Jewish women and girls. Such inhumane sexual acts have resonated profoundly in our community. Every girl assaulted by Hamas was or is potentially a future Jewish mother. Every woman who was profanely violated was or is a mother, grandmother, sister or aunt. The defilement and debasement represents a "churban" — massive destruction and desecration — of Jewish women, who are the fulcrum of community life.

Desecration resonates so deeply in our religion that our calendars are marked with holy days and fast days to commemorate those events in our history. We use dates of desecration as markers to delineate our inextinguishable flame of survival against all odds. Jews understand this intrinsically. However, others do not. They have neither endured the cycles of persecution, murder and annihilation nor have they been repeatedly scorned by cadres of enemies.

Our disappointment may stem from giving too much credit to our "assimilation" into today's modern world. On one

hand, at no other time in Jewish history have we so seamlessly integrated with non-Jewish populations. The modern Jew today exists in a world of all nationalities and faiths — a stark contrast to close-knit shtetls. On the other hand, assimilation is often deceptive because it offers a false sense of integration with other ethnic groups and faiths. The reality belies this myth. We have seen this play out in the wake of the Oct. 7 massacre with the reluctance of women's groups to support their Jewish sisters.

Alas, our sisters in solidarity, with whom we've labored to support reproductive freedom, the Equal Rights Amendment, LGBTQ+ rights and other important women's issues, have woefully disappointed us. They have been slow to respond, if at all, to our searing pain. We expected *rachmones* — sympathy,

empathy, understanding — to flow from human kindness. Instead, reminders of the Shoah have hit us in the face. Once again we are alone, forced to navigate our fate sans champions to take up our cause.

All in all, the ruse of modern times may have led most of us to think we have successfully assimilated. When in truth, we stand very much alone. Perhaps this is a wakeup call. If so, we need to reevaluate, recalibrate and reconsider our role in the women's movement.

Our tradition teaches us to be strong and to never give up. It also teaches us to stand up for what's right. This includes demanding accountability from the women's movement and the international community for their shameful silence about Oct. 7. ■

The views expressed on the opinion pages are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of J.

hateful to you, do not do unto your fellow. That is the whole Torah. The rest is the explanation. Go and learn"

I'm 78 years old, and I remember when antisemitism was about Jew hatred, excluding Jews from jobs, university entrance and other privileges granted to non-Jews. Practicing the Jewish religion my parents taught me, treating other people the way I want to be treated, is not antisemitism. But opposing me for doing so is.

LOIS PEARLMAN | GUERNEVILLE

Support for Israeli policies hurts us all

As we plan communal responses to antisemitism in the year ahead, let us think and act more expansively than erecting larger menorahs requiring 24-hour security ("Hundreds attend Oakland menorah lighting after antisemitic vandalism," Dec. 14).

To achieve peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians, we must raise our voices to demand a two-state solution. As Jews, we have marched for innumerable just causes. We Jews should also have been marching for all these decades to demand a two-state solution. A recent Harvard CAPS/Harris poll revealed that a majority of 18- to 24-year-old Americans, whom we know were raised learning the lessons of our civil rights leaders, now believe Israel should no longer exist!

Perhaps they would have joined our voices for justice in the Middle East.

Our silence makes us complicit in the Israeli government policies that strengthen and abet the occupation and thus foment worldwide rage, anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

JAMES GRACER | OAKLAND

Jewish staffers' baffling response

One can understand why people concerned about the death toll in Gaza might advocate for a cease-fire. Even with knowledge that the Hamas-reported death toll is inflated and that a significant number of the dead are Hamas fighters, nobody should be celebrating the civilian deaths. While Hamas bears the moral responsibility for those, it doesn't lessen the human tragedy.

However, the letter from staffers of Jewish community organizations calling for a cease-fire is baffling ("More than 700 staffers of Jewish groups, most of them progressive, appeal to Biden for cease-fire in Israel," Dec. 11). These are people who have undoubtedly been informed that Hamas has promised to repeat the atrocities of Oct. 7 again and again.

Some of them might have access to the video documentation of the torture and murder of civilians provided by Hamas itself,

if they chose to watch it. "Lasting peace and security" simply cannot be achieved if Hamas remains in Gaza to steal international aid and rebuild its capacity to terrorize Israelis.

Yet it appears that these staffers advocate for allowing Hamas to remain, as their letter does not require that as a condition for a cease-fire. One rabbi was quoted in the article as saying that she supported a cease-fire "for the sake of defeating the insidious ideology of Hamas." Exactly how does leaving Hamas in control defeat its ideology? Perhaps their privilege of living thousands of miles away from Gaza is what allows these individuals to support keeping Hamas in power, which is the inevitable result of their demand.

Hamas can bring about a cease-fire tomorrow by surrendering, giving up power in Gaza and returning all the remaining hostages. And never forget that there was a cease-fire with Hamas in place on Oct. 6.

MICHAEL HARRIS | BODEGA BAY

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