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Sabotage and Subterfuge: The U.N.’s Response to Sheryl Sandberg’s ‘Screams Before Silence’

The disgraceful role played by the UN in renouncing and shunning Israeli victims of sexual violence has had an effect on the women’s movement.

BY AMY NEUSTEIN, PH.D. • COMMENTARY • MAY 16, 2024

Author and International Relations expert Dr. Yvette Alt Miller, in her recent column in Aish, stated that around the time that Sheryl Sandberg’s documentary about the October 7 rapes and murders of women and girls, *Screams Before Silence*, was released, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres “all but publicly declared Hamas had not used sexual violence” against Israeli women and girls. Alt Miller pointed out that in Guterres’ annual report titled “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence” he paradoxically *failed* to list Hamas among the organizations that had employed sexual violence in the past year.

Such an omission by the UN Secretary General is highly disconcerting considering that UN investigators who had traveled to Israel – performing extensive reviews of post-mortem pathology reports, audio and video recordings, witness statements, among other forensic materials – told the UN Security Council in March that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence – including rape and gang-rape – occurred across multiple locations of Israel and the Gaza periphery during the attacks on October 7, 2023.”

Even more insidious, is that a week after the release of Sandberg’s documentary showing unimpeachable documentation of the execrable acts of sexual violence and torture toward females (and even males), the UN released a troubling story to Agence France-Presse (AFP) – headquartered in Paris and serving as the oldest news wire service in the world reaching out to over 150 countries. The flashy heading, “UN Experts Condemn Israel’s Sexual Assault and Violence in Gaza,” was designed to catch attention though the article fell short of providing any meaningful details of sexual violence perpetrated by IDF soldiers against Gazan inhabitants.

Nevertheless, this absurdly fatuous, unsubstantiated UN report, condemning Israeli military for horrific acts they didn’t commit, was intended as sabotage and subterfuge so as to divert attention from the blood-curdling incidents of rape and sexual torture copiously documented by Sandberg in *Screams Before Silence*. What does this say about the world’s denial of sexual violence when it happens to Jewish females? Sandberg got it right when she told Chris Cuomo last week on *News Nation*: “This is what we’re up against...this is a challenge to our way of life, this is a challenge to Democracy, this is a challenge to equality for women, anywhere in the world!”

Sandberg’s exhortations were presaged by Bev Goldman, writer for *Jewish Life Magazine*, the largest circulating and widely read Jewish publication in South Africa. In her article aptly titled “Israel in Context: Silence!” Goldman vehemently called out the UN for its double standard: “The UN’s disregard and tone deaf response to Hamas’s attack is woefully unsatisfactory...” In describing the violation of Israeli women and girls, the writer *ululated*: “The obscene and repulsive treatment they meted out to the Israeli women, both those barely alive and those already dead, cannot be comprehended by anyone for whom morality is a life value. It cannot. It is too incomprehensible, too unfathomable, too repellent.”

In her article for *Jewish Life*, Goldman chronicled the emergence of international laws prohibiting sexual violence against women and girls: “In 1993, the UN Commission on Human Rights (replaced in 2006 by the UN Human Rights Council) declared systematic rape...to be crimes against humanity punishable as violations of women’s human rights. In 1995, the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women specified that rape by armed groups during wartime is a war crime.” She then pointed to a 1998 landmark case wherein a “Rwandan tribunal had ruled that specifically, ‘rape and sexual violence constitute genocide’” and later “[i]n 2008, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1820, which stated that ‘rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.’”

As a sociologist, I am deeply troubled by the reprise of distortion, dismissal, and denial in the face of irrefutable evidence of sexual violence and torture of Israeli women and girls. As I wrote in *Women’s eNews* last fall, “the abject failure for organized women’s groups to repudiate the brutal rape of Israeli teenagers and women signifies a serious failure in the women’s movement today.”

Since my writing of that editorial, I have seen over time how the disgraceful role played by the UN in renouncing and shunning Israeli victims of sexual violence has had an effect on the women’s movement. Sadly, Israeli rape victims, and their Jewish counterparts in the Diaspora, stand alone. The signs of “microaggression” (the term coined by Harvard psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce in 1970 to describe deprecations, disparagements or dismissals of certain racial and ethnic groups) toward Israeli rape victims are inevitably clear, and there is no outcry from the women’s movement to redress this striking inequity.

I am going to add my “screams” by turning up the volume and shouting from the rooftops until the women’s movement and the UN acknowledge the horror and dreadfulness of the unprecedented sexual violence painstakingly captured in Sandberg’s *Screams Before Silence*. To do anything less would be a betrayal to my sisters in Israel, and to womankind.



About the Author: Amy Neustein, Ph.D., is working on a second edition to *From Madness to Mutiny* to be published by Oxford University Press. She is the author/editor of 16 books published by leading academic houses. Since the October 7 massacre she has had 51 guest columns (which include reprints) appear in publications such as *Women’s eNews*, *The Hill*, *Newsweek*, *Aish.com*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Jewish News of Northern California*, *the Washington Jewish Week*, *The Jewish Standard/Times of Israel*, *the San Diego Jewish World*, *the Jewish Exponent*, and other venues. She recently appeared on *Talkline* with Zev Brenner.



Author

