

# The Women's Movement Must Decry the Rape of Israeli Teenagers and Women during the October 7 Massacre

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.

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Meredith Jacobs, CEO of Jewish Women International, wrote a column this week in the *Forward* which resonates with me very deeply. Titled, “The Women’s Movement has a Double Standard when Sexual Violence happens to Jews” ([Sexual violence against Jews is ignored by the women’s movement – The Forward](#)), Jacobs offered a penetrating look into the reactions of major women’s organizations to the savagery and barbarity committed against Israeli women – defiled, mutilated, and soaked in blood – in the towns and Kibbutzim along the Gazan border in the October 7 massacre. These unsuspecting rape victims were both teenage girls and adults. Many were married women who had been raising families and contributing to community life; some were even in the late stages of pregnancy.

Much to Jacobs’ chagrin, she wrote in her column about the deafening silence she encountered in her Zoom calls and meetings with women’s groups, particularly those with whom she had collaborated over the years about ending sexual violence against women. She was flummoxed because where she expected compassion, or what is known in Jewish culture as “rachmones” (the Yiddish word for mercy, pity, empathy), she found a blithe response at best and apathy at worst. Suddenly, in one moment all the ghosts of desolation, fear, and desertion – embedded in the Holocaust memory – came rushing back to Jacobs who summed up: “I’m overwhelmed by a sense of aloneness in the world.” She expounded, “We must continue to tell the simple reality: Violence against Jewish bodies, Israeli bodies, is a crime against humanity.”

Jacobs’ words resonate with me because I am a Jewish mother who has devoted her entire life to helping other mothers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who have been victims of domestic violence and whose children have been cruelly sodomized and raped. The mothers of these children have been doubly tortured because they have had to stand by and watch their children descend into suicidal depression, anorexia, and worse as the family courts reward the fathers who rape their children with full custody and the mothers must pay hundreds of dollars a week to see their children under strict court-ordered supervision. Upon reflecting on my work as an advocate for battered women, I realize what drives me is my memory of how Jewish women were once deemed utterly dispensable; they were loathed and discarded after gang rapes by their Nazi tormentors. What I saw last month in the Hamas attack on Israeli women was eerily reminiscent of those atrocities of yesteryear.

When society descends into a quarry of madness and hate, women and children naturally become its first victims. This is axiomatic: women who deserve, require and need protection are, instead, defiled, injured, mangled and murdered. October 7 presaged a level of mass assault against teenage girls and women that bespeaks a new era of moral decrepitude. The danger is that the abject failure for organized women’s groups, in concert with special committees and task forces of the United Nations set up specifically to combat violence against women, to repudiate the brutal rape of Israeli teenagers and women signifies a serious failure in the women’s movement today. It is a betrayal of victims of sexual violence of epic proportion, for those who most need support have been haplessly left behind.

Over the decades, as a feminist author, advocate, and activist I have learned to never give up. That means that I have an inextinguishable flame inside me, which propels my moving forward in my pursuit of justice for women and children, notwithstanding the Herculean challenges placed in my path. So many times, when I’ve tried to get the ear of those high up in government to respond to the plight of battered women and sexually abused children, I’ve been met with platitudes and indifference. Yet, I am not deterred. I persist since I know the assault on women and children is opprobrious and execrable. It is with the same tenacity and conviction that I implore the women’s movement to join me as a Jewish mother in condemning the unspeakable violence perpetrated against the young girls and women, who had been innocently going about their lives at the Kibbutzim and small towns in the southern part of Israel on that ill-fated Saturday morning on the seventh of October.

I am using my public profile as a writer and activist to make an entreaty to the women’s movement to respond with indignation and ire over the rape, defilement, and slaughter of our sisters in Israel. Phlegmatic responses are inexcusable. Even worse, apathy is deeply offensive because we all understand the perils of sexual assault. Meredith Jacobs summed it up so adroitly when she pointed out the “double standard” in the women’s movement when sexual violence befalls Jewish women. We can change that. The women’s movement must listen to the cries of their Jewish sisters.



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