

We Count the Dead, Then Forget Their Names

Remembering October 7th in the Present and in History

What Happened on October 7

At 6:29 a.m., air raid sirens sounded across southern Israel as Hamas launched more than three thousand rockets within the first hour of its planned assault. Militants invaded the Gaza-Israel barrier at twenty-nine separate locations using explosives, bulldozers, motorcycles, trucks, and paragliders. They attacked civilian towns, kibbutzim (agricultural communities), police stations, and the Nova music festival in Re'im. More than twelve hundred people were killed within a single day. Among the dead were infants, the elderly, foreign agricultural workers, and off-duty security officers. Around two hundred fifty people were taken hostage and transported into Gaza, most of them civilians, and several were later confirmed dead in captivity.

The morning began with music and ended with massacres.

By mid-morning, communication networks were shutting down and videos from both residents and attackers began trending online before the full scale of the violence was soon shown. Footage verified by BBC Verify and

Forensic Architecture showed armed men firing into homes, cars, and bomb shelters. In Kfar Aza and Be'eri, entire families were killed inside their houses. First responders from ZAKA described burned and cut-up bodies across multiple sites. At the Nova festival alone, more than three hundred sixty people were murdered while fleeing toward the desert, an amount confirmed by Israel's National Forensic Institute.. Drone footage later showed hundreds of destroyed vehicles and tents spread across many kilometers of land.

Witness accounts collected by emergency logs reveal panic in real time. Hundreds of callers whispered from safe rooms before their lines went silent. Paramedics arriving later reported victims with gunshot wounds, burn injuries, and signs of execution, including hands bound with plastic restraints. Videos released by Hamas units showed fighters celebrating over bodies and transporting hostages in vehicles marked with their insignia. Analysis by the New York Times Visual Investigations unit confirmed that timestamps and geolocations in these clips matched verified attack sites.

The assault lasted nearly twenty hours before Israeli forces regained partial control of the border. It was the deadliest single day for Jewish civilians since the Holocaust and the most extensive breach of Israeli territory since 1948. Governments across the world condemned the killings as war crimes. Hamas framed the attack as retaliation for occupation and blockade. For civilians, the reasoning made no difference, the outcome was the same. Families were erased, communities were destroyed, and the region was pushed into another cycle of war.

Evidence of Atrocities

Investigations done in the months after the attacks produced substantial evidence of sexual violence, civilian executions, and deliberate targeting of non-combatants. The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry reported in June 2024 that there were reasonable grounds to believe rape and gang rape occurred during the October 7 assault, supported by forensic findings and testimonies from first responders. Israeli forensic teams at the Abu Kabir National Institute of Forensic Medicine documented genital trauma and signs of binding on several female victims recovered from multiple attack sites. First responders from ZAKA described encountering women found naked or partially clothed with hands and feet bound, in positions consistent with sexual assault and execution. The Israeli Association of Rape Crisis Centers submitted a report to the United Nations in February 2024 gathering testimonies from medics, forensic pathologists (causes and effects scientist), and survivors validating patterns of sexual violence, mutilation, and humiliation. Human Rights Watch reviewed these reports and concluded that physical and testimonial evidence strongly suggested sexual violence had occurred, although limited access to crime scenes and fast burials prevented full verification. The Dinah Project, an Israeli nongovernmental organization that specializes in documenting gender-based violence, published a separate 180-page report in July 2024 detailing more than thirty distinct cases of sexual assault supported by medical, photographic, and witness evidence. Videos analyzed by the New York Times Visual Investigations team, BBC Verify, and Forensic Architecture confirmed multiple incidents of female civilians being stripped, dragged, or found unclothed after execution. Metadata, shadows,

and geolocation confirmed that these videos were recorded at verified attack sites, primarily in Be'eri, Kfar Aza, and near the Nova festival grounds.

The evidence is incomplete. The pattern is not.

Several released hostages reported sexual abuse, harassment, and forced nudity while in captivity. UN investigators documented testimonies of women who were harassed or assaulted in public during the initial stages of the attack. Forensic examiners noted that many of the bodies brought to morgues showed signs of sexualized violence that could not be attributed to post-mortem (examination after death) burns or explosion injuries. In total, more than one hundred cases were reviewed by international and local forensic experts, and while not all could be confirmed beyond doubt, the consistent patterns across independent investigations suggested deliberate gender-based violence. Hamas officials denied all accusations and characterized them as Israeli propaganda. However, no internal investigation or disciplinary action was conducted by Hamas leadership, and no evidence was presented to counter the verified findings published by the United Nations and independent journalists. The lack of cooperation limited access to important sites in Gaza, preventing international teams from examining additional forensic material. Despite these obstacles, the available documentation from NGOs, UN teams, and verified video footage establishes that sexual violence and civilian killings were widespread and systematic, representing one of the clearest breaches of international humanitarian law in recent memory.

Denial and Propaganda

Hamas officials publicly denied every allegation of rape and sexual violence, calling them fabricated and politically motivated. Israeli leaders used the same reports to justify expanded military operations in Gaza, citing October 7 as moral grounds for destruction that followed. The United Nations called for full access to all crime scenes, but investigators were blocked from Gaza and could only verify what was recovered inside Israel. Online, both sides built their own versions of the truth. Dozens of fake videos appeared within days, some edited, some mislabeled, spreading faster than corrections could reach them. Activists reposted without checking sources, and the images of real victims became tools for propaganda. Several media outlets later retracted claims that could not be verified, but the damage had already taken hold. Two years later, the arguments remain louder than the evidence itself.

The Aftermath and Global Response

In the days after the attack, Israel declared a state of war for the first time in fifty years. Airstrikes began across Gaza within hours, targeting militant positions but also hitting residential areas. Thousands of civilians were killed in the first month, including children and medical workers. The United Nations reported that over a million people were displaced from their homes, creating one of the largest internal refugee movements in the region's history. International law experts described both the October 7 massacre and the bombardment that followed as potential war crimes under the Geneva Conventions. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty

International called for independent investigations into violations on both sides, but access to Gaza remained limited.

Western governments expressed full solidarity with Israel in the first weeks, later urging restraint as civilian casualties increased. Protests were created in major cities across Europe, North America, and the Middle East.

Demonstrators demanded an immediate ceasefire, while others condemned the attacks of October 7 as terrorism. Social media screamed division, spreading partial truths faster than any official statement could correct. The International Criminal Court announced a preliminary examination into the conflict, but progress slowed due to political pressure. In Israel, grief turned to anger and a new fear of failure within the state's security institutions. In Gaza, hospitals ran out of medicine, and residents dug through rubble with bare hands. Aid convoys were often delayed at border crossings, forcing families to survive on limited food and water. Governments argued over terminology (occupation, retaliation, defense) while the death toll kept rising.

Two years later, memorials for October 7 coexist with ruins in Gaza. The survivors on both sides live in different versions of the same memory. The date has become a political antique rather than a moment of shared mourning. Many activists mark it as the start of a genocide, while others still treat it as proof of eternal victimhood. Few speak of what came between, the actual people who died, the evidence, the silence, and the unending cycle of blame.

Two Years Later

Two years after the attack, the wounds remain open on both sides of the border. Families of Israeli victims still wait for justice, while families in Gaza waited for the sky to stop falling. Entire towns near the border have not fully rebuilt, and thousands of displaced Gazans continue to live without power or clean water. The governments that claimed to defend their people have only defended their power. Hamas still held hostages, and Israel still held thousands of Palestinians in indefinite detention. The international community moves between sympathy and exhaustion, releasing statements that mean little to the dead. Online, grief is filtered through politics until it becomes unrecognizable. Some use October 7 to justify erasure, and others use Gaza's ruins to justify denial. The truth sits somewhere no one wants to stand. Memory has become a weapon, and empathy has become selective. The war did not end, it only changed names. Two years later, the world still counts the dead like statistics, and forgets their names before the list is finished.

Remember their names together, or we will forget our own.

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