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**UN Human Rights Council**

**55th Regular Session – 27 March 2024**

**Item 8 - General Debate**

Ms. Yeela Cytrin, Adv.

Legal Adviser, Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva

Thank you,

Throughout history, women’s bodies have been taken as spoils of war. In armed conflicts worldwide, we have witnessed the deliberate use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

The international community must be unequivocal in its condemnation of all acts of sexual violence. **Silence on this issue is complicity.**

In its onslaught on October 7th, Hamas used sexual violence as a weapon. As appears in the report of the SRSG on sexual violence against women in conflict - sources described finding murdered individuals, mostly women, whose bodies were naked from their waist down – and some totally naked – tied with their hands behind their backs, or tied to structures, many of whom were shot in the head.

These attacks, perpetrated simultaneously in different locations, within a confined timeframe and with similar patterns, may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The testimonies of those released from Hamas captivity in Gaza also raise harrowing accounts of sexual violence.

Yesterday, the NY Times published the testimony of Amit Soussana who returned from 55 days in captivity.

“He sat me on the edge of the bath. And I closed my legs. And I resisted. And he kept punching me and put his gun in my face”. “Then he dragged me to the bedroom.” At that point, she said, he forced her to commit a sexual act on him.

19 women are still held hostage. We must bring them home NOW.