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Medical Report on the Needs of Women Abducted by the Hamas

On October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists attacked communities and sites in southern Israel, murdering 1300 men, women and children and injuring thousands. The atrocities included the brutal abduction of over 200 Israelis, a significant number of whom were women, girls, and elderly women, some of whom were subjected to appalling sexual violence. Women face unique vulnerabilities in violent conflicts, including **sexual abuse, humiliation, and long-term physical and mental consequences**. The disturbing testimonies and videos circulated on the internet shed light on the severe challenges faced by women who were victims of the violent events of October 7th and its aftermath.

A significant number of the abducted women are dealing with complex medical conditions and suffering from various health issues such as **breast cancer**, hypertension, atrial fibrillation, diabetes mellitus, ischemic heart disease, heart failure and a prosthetic heart valve. All of these medical conditions necessitate specialized medical treatment and regular consultations with doctors. Denying them access to this essential medical care for their pre-existing medical conditions, as well as injuries (detailed below) sustained during their violent abduction constitutes a form of **torture** and goes against all principles of humanity and international conventions and puts their lives at risk.

The Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, contain provisions related to the treatment of women in captivity during armed conflicts. These provisions emphasize **the need to protect women from violence and sexual abuse**, ensure their dignity is respected, address their special needs, provide care for pregnant women, and preserve family unity. These rules aim to uphold the rights and well-being of all individuals during times of war, emphasizing the principles of humanity and the minimization of human suffering.

Sexual violence, including rape, at its core, is an instrument of power in warfare, designed to humiliate, subjugate, and conquer the enemy, amounting, at times, to acts of genocide. Researches suggests that sexual assault is one of the war tactics used to subdue the civilian population and sow destruction and chaos.

In modern discussions on war and gender, there is a growing awareness that sexual violence during conflicts is often a deliberate, organized strategy known as 'rape as a weapon of war'. This perspective highlights that sexual violence is not a random byproduct of war but a systematic and planned element.

Key Findings

The majority of those abducted comprise civilians, many of whom have complex medical conditions and/or injuries. Among the various medical challenges experienced by women in captivity are the following:

Injuries Resulting from the Brutal Abduction:

Women who were injured during the abduction as a result of the brutal incident suffer from physical injuries, gunshot wounds, and open wounds, as seen in video documentation. Orthopedic issues, fractures, and the development of strictures due to a lack of appropriate immediate treatment are common.

Some of the abducted women were forced to walk barefoot, which may have resulted in additional injuries, and it is uncertain if anyone attended to their injuries or provided first aid. They may be at risk of infections resulting from the open wounds and might require tetanus vaccinations. These infections are likely to be life threatening if left untreated.

Gender-specific medical conditions among abducted women:

Women who have experienced **rape** are at risk of physical injury, sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, severe tears in the vaginal wall and bladder, the development of fistulas, damage to future reproductive capacity, miscarriage, and unwanted pregnancy. In addition to the physical implications, rape can trigger a range of emotional and long-term psychological consequences. These may include profound emotional trauma with a significant and enduring impact, leading to feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Such trauma can result in persistent mental health challenges, substance abuse, and chronic health problems.

Mothers separated from their babies and children suffer from severe emotional distress.

Discontinuing hormonal birth control pills entails several potential risks. Some women rely on these pills to manage medical conditions (such as endometriosis).

Abducted women of childbearing age are at risk of pregnancy due to sexual assault, with severe physical and psychological consequences that are not detailed in this report.

Breastfeeding women who were abducted may suffer from breast inflammation (mastitis) and the formation of abscesses, as well as acute reduction in breast milk production.

Pregnant women may require special care for both the mother and the fetus. They may experience complications such as preterm labor and delivery, intra-uterine growth restriction, placental abruption due to physical trauma, preeclampsia and bleeding due to miscarriage.

Women with pre-existing complex medical condition and chronic illnesses:

Some of the abducted women have **breast cancer** and are dependent on their essential oncological treatment.

Some of the abducted women are suffering from severe chronic medical conditions, including thyroid problems (hypo- or hyper-), asthma, cardiac arrhythmias, blood clotting disorders, autoimmune diseases, recurrent urinary tract infections, glaucoma, (which, when left untreated, can lead to permanent vision loss or even blindness), diabetes mellitus, hypertension, chronic heart failure and atherosclerosis.

These women depend on medications and regular medical care to manage these conditions effectively. **Without access to this essential treatment during their captivity, their health situations will deteriorate**, leading to increased suffering, complications, reduced quality of life, potential hospitalization, disability, and even life-threatening situations. Deliberately preventing them from receiving the necessary medical care is a grave violation of their human rights, constitutes a **form of torture** and endangers their lives.

Women with mental health conditions:

Women with mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety, who take antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications may experience exacerbated depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric illnesses, even without the additional stress and psychological trauma.

Even women without psychiatric disorders prior to their abduction may suffer from trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Captive conditions:

Profound concerns arise regarding the physical and psychological well-being of women held in captivity. Inadequate hygiene, nutrition, and access to clean water can result in health complications and immense suffering. Additionally, these conditions render women highly susceptible to the risk of enduring torture and its harrowing implications.

Underweight women and women with Anorexia are at a higher risk of compounded issues, including an increased likelihood of malnutrition, impaired immune function, and further weight loss.

Under certain conditions, such as poor hygiene, abducted women may develop urinary tract infections (UTIs). If left untreated, UTIs can progress to kidney complications, and sepsis. In older individuals, they may result in sudden confusion, also known as delirium.

Examples of specific hostage women include:

Shiri Bibas - A 32-year-old mother of a 9 month-old infant and 4 year-old toddler.

Yaffa Adar - A 85-year-old woman. She has multiple chronic diseases, including congestive heart failure, arrhythmia, chronic kidney disease, and chronic back pain caused by a herniated disc. In addition to walking assistance, Yaffa needs a caregiver.

Hana Peri - A 79-year-old woman with diabetes treated with insulin on a regular basis. Due to the diabetes, she lost her vision in one eye. She suffers from High blood pressure. She had breast cancer in the past.

Shani Goren - A 29-year-old woman grappling with anxiety and depression treatment with antidepressants, alongside her reliance on inhalers to manage her respiratory condition.

Romi Gonen - A 23-year-old woman. She has sustained a gunshot wound and is dependent on contraceptive pills. She uses an inhaler for her respiratory tract ailments. She suffers from dust allergies and eczema.

Summary

The medical information as presented above reveals the plight of some of the abducted women. We provided several examples of hostages that their family gave consent to share their medical details. Each and every hostage is a tragic torture that must be urgently addressed to prevent further harm. There are likely other injuries and medical conditions of which we are unaware as the data is partial. Many of these women suffer from complex medical conditions or injuries, including the need for specialized care, while enduring the mental scars of sexual abuse, humiliation, and continuous trauma. **Urgently, we appeal for their immediate release to safeguard their basic human rights and provide them with the essential medical and psychological care they require to heal from the profound physical and emotional consequences of their ordeal.**

Up to this point, as far as we know, no contact between the Red Cross and the hostages has been established. This inhumane situation places the hostages at an elevated risk of experiencing further violence, torture and neglect. At the very least, we demand to receive through the Red Cross, assurances that all abductees have access to medical services. and that their families receive signs of life.

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