



**Submission to the United Nations Committee against Torture
concerning the Committee's Fifth Periodic Review of Israel**

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About the Submitting Organization

DIGNITY is an independent human rights and development organization, whose vision is a world free of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Founded in 1982, DIGNITY is one of the world's first anti-torture NGOs and specialized treatment centres for torture survivors. For 40 years, DIGNITY has been a leading civil society force in the global fight against torture and today our programming spans the health, legal and political sectors. DIGNITY is headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark, has country offices in Jordan and Tunisia, and currently employs around 140 staff globally. We have active partnerships with more than 30 local and international NGOs and research institutions around the world. DIGNITY operates in more than 20 countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Central America, where we work in close partnerships with human rights defenders, civil society organizations and, where possible, government authorities.

INTRODUCTION

1. DIGNITY makes this submission as part of the United Nations Committee Against Torture's (the Committee) sixth periodic review of Israel. This submission focuses on the means through which Israeli military and other security forces perpetrate torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against Palestinians from Gaza in the context of the full-scale military operation in Gaza following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks.
2. In particular, this submission focuses on how Israeli Forces rely on and deploy gender norms as a means to increase the suffering of and punish, intimidate, and discriminate against their victims. It draws from factual findings of United Nations investigative, humanitarian, and human rights mandates and civil society organizations detailing the types and modes of gendered harm experienced by Palestinians in Gaza post-7 October 2023.

GENDER-BASED TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT OF PALESTINIANS FROM GAZA

3. Since 7 October 2023, Israeli Forces have engaged in widespread and systematic torture and other ill-treatment of Palestinians from Gaza in fundamentally gendered ways.
4. The methods that are chosen, the meanings attached to them, and the ways they are experienced reveal a deliberate weaponization of gender roles and norms.
5. The targeting of Palestinian men, women, boys, and girls is deeply entangled with social constructs of masculinity, femininity, modesty, protection, and shame. These constructs are exploited by Israeli Forces to maximize suffering and to punish, intimidate and discriminate against individual detainees and the broader Palestinian community in Gaza.
6. Torture in this context must be understood not solely through its physical severity, but also through the gendered dimensions of its intent and psychological harm.
7. The following outlines how Israeli Forces' torture and other ill-treatment of Palestinians from Gaza follows gender-informed modes of violence across three domains: (1) arrest and detention, (2) technology-facilitated abuse, and (3) reproductive violence. A gender-competent lens reveals the logic behind these acts and exposes how Israeli authorities have calibrated violence to resonate within and rupture Palestinian social fabric.

A. Arrest and Detention: Gendered Methods of Torture and Ill-Treatment

Palestinian Men and Boys: Emasculation and the Destruction of Social Authority

8. Since the ground invasion of Gaza began, Israeli Forces have detained thousands of Palestinian men and boys under conditions that deliberately strip them of social power, personal dignity, and social standing.¹
9. Arrested *en masse* Palestinian men and boys were blindfolded, bound, forcibly stripped of clothing, and paraded publicly in underwear or naked, often in front of their families,

¹ UNOHCHR, Thematic report - 2024, Detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza (October 2023-June 2024), para. 12; UNSRoPt, Report - 2024. U.N. Doc. A/79/384, para. 27.

neighbors or entire communities.² These arrests were theatrical, symbolic, and deeply gendered—designed to visibly dominate, humiliate, and erase any perceived strength, authority or autonomy associated with Palestinian male identity.

10. One victim described the specific humiliation of being arrested in front of his wife and children, publicly undressed, and forced to walk barefoot through the neighborhood with scores of other men and boys similarly exposed—before being forced to kneel with hundreds of others, all nearly naked.³
11. Upon arrival at detention sites, male detainees were restrained naked or nearly naked for prolonged periods, denied access to toilets, forced to soil themselves in adult diapers, and urinated on while being called “animals”.⁴ Many described sexualized violence including anal rape/penetration with objects, beatings to the genitals,⁵ and threats of rape against their wives and daughters.⁶
12. These forms of abuse are complex—targeting the victim’s body and psyche by dominating, infantilizing, and dismantling core pillars of masculinity. They send the clear message that rather than autonomous protectors, providers and heads of households, Palestinian men and boys are weak, controlled, exposed, and defeated. The resulting harm extends far beyond the individual—it is meant to reverberate through families and communities as a collective assault on the Palestinian social fabric.

² UNOHCHR, Thematic report – 2024, Detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza (October 2023-June 2024), paras. 38-44, 95; UNSRoPt, Report - 2024. U.N. Doc. A/79/384, para. 27; Amnesty International, 2024, Israel must end mass incommunicado detention and torture of Palestinians from Gaza, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/israel-must-end-mass-incommunicado-detention-and-torture-of-palestinians-from-gaza/>; UNRWA, 2024, Detention and alleged ill-treatment of detainees from Gaza during Israel-Hamas War, p. 2., https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/summary_on_detention_and_alleged_ill-treatmentupdated.pdf.

³ UNOHCHR, Thematic report – 2024, Detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza (October 2023-June 2024), para. 95.

⁴ Amnesty International, 2024, Israel must end mass incommunicado detention and torture of Palestinians from Gaza, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/israel-must-end-mass-incommunicado-detention-and-torture-of-palestinians-from-gaza/>; UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2024, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/56/CRP.4, paras. 51, 53; UNRWA, 2024, Detention and alleged ill-treatment of detainees from Gaza during Israel-Hamas War, pp. 1-2.

⁵ This pattern of genital-focused violence is intentional as it weaponizes the symbolic site of masculine power and bodily autonomy.

⁶ Adalah et al., 2024, Systemic torture and inhumane treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prison facilities since October 7, 2023: Urgent appeal to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, p. 7, https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/Submission_SR_Torture_final-15.2.24.pdf; UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, paras. 118-119, 194; UNRWA, 2024, Detention and alleged ill-treatment of detainees from Gaza during Israel-Hamas War, p. 2, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/summary_on_detention_and_alleged_ill-treatmentupdated.pdf.

Palestinian Women and Girls: Sexualized Violence and Assault on Modesty

13. Palestinian women and girls arrested and detained by Israeli Forces face different—but equally gendered—forms of violence. Whereas Palestinian men and boys are emasculated, Palestinian women and girls are sexualized.
14. Palestinian women reported repeated strip and body searches by male soldiers, including while menstruating, with no option for female officers and no regard for religious modesty.⁷ One woman reported being strip-searched every three hours, including while menstruating, as guards mocked and laughed at her.⁸ Many were groped, slapped, and verbally degraded—referred to as “whores,” “bitches,” or “ugly” during interrogations.⁹ Others described being threatened with rape in front of family members.¹⁰ In one incident, a woman was forced to undress in front of her children while a soldier said he wanted to “check if she was still a virgin”.¹¹
15. Such sexualization and degradation invokes patriarchal codes of modesty, chastity, and shame that are part of Gaza’s sociocultural context. By forcibly removing veils, exposing undergarments and bodies, and sexually assaulting through unnecessary and intentionally humiliating body searches¹² these attack Palestinian women *as women* and the family and community honor systems in which they are situated. The aim is to physically and psychologically harm, and to socially disgrace.

B. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Torture and Humiliation

16. Israeli Forces’ abuse extends into digital realms, where technology has been used to magnify the gendered effects of torture and other ill-treatment by making it public, searchable, and permanent.

Men and Boys: Public Emasculation via Digital Platforms

17. In at least ten incidents, hundreds of Palestinian men and boys were filmed by Israeli soldiers during mass arrests. Images of these arrests were posted online, including on soldiers’ private social media accounts and public Telegram groups, depicting Palestinian men stripped to their underwear or fully naked, paraded before cameras, and forced into subordinate positions (e.g., kneeling, lying face down, or tied to chairs).¹³ In at least one instance, two teenage boys were ordered by a female Israeli soldier to dance together in their underwear, whilst she filmed them and laughed.¹⁴

⁷ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, paras. 108, 112-113.

⁸ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 125.

⁹ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 125.

¹⁰ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, paras. 111, 124.

¹¹ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 125.

¹² UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 103.

¹³ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 93; UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2024, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/56/CRP.4, paras. 386, 388.

¹⁴ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2024, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/56/CRP.4, paras. 366.

18. These images and postings digitally etch powerlessness into the online public domain where millions of users can view the victims' torture and subjugation. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (UNCOI) concluded that such recordings were part of a "rapidly spreading practice" aimed at feminizing, humiliating, and dominating Palestinian men and boys.¹⁵ In doing so, these images and postings erode perceptions and norms of Palestinian manhood and resistance.

Women and Girls: Digital Sexualization and Invasion of Privacy

19. In parallel, women have been targeted through digital sexualization. Israeli soldiers filmed themselves ransacking women's homes, focusing on intimate items like underwear and lingerie while narrating lewd commentary. In one video posted to social media, a soldier mocked: "Arabs [female pronouns] are the biggest sluts out there" referencing underwear belonging to a Palestinian woman whose house he was searching.¹⁶ In another video, a soldier described "piles" of exotic lingerie found during raids, joking about "naughty Gazans".¹⁷ The UNCOI concluded these acts reflected "clear gender and racial bias," with the intention of causing long-term humiliation and reputational damage.¹⁸
20. Through digital and social media platforms, sexualization of Palestinian women and girls extends beyond their body, into their homes and onto their possessions—vaulting private elements of their lives and bodies into the global public sphere as objects of ridicule and shame.

C. Reproductive Violence and the Weaponization of Bodily Functions

21. Israeli operations have turned basic biological and reproductive functions into sites of psychological and physical suffering for Palestinian women and girls in Gaza. By attacking Gaza's reproductive health infrastructure and supplies, Israeli Forces have transformed pregnancy and childbirth, menstruation, breastfeeding and childrearing into forms of punishment and discrimination.

Collapse of Reproductive Health

22. Through the Israeli Forces' bombing campaign, Gaza's hospitals and maternity wards have been destroyed and/or rendered inoperable, leaving thousands of pregnant women without access to obstetric or emergency care. Women have been forced to give birth without anaesthesia, sutures, or antibiotics, sometimes on the floor of shelters or destroyed medical facilities.¹⁹ Caesarean deliveries are delayed, wounds left untreated, and

¹⁵ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 125.

¹⁶ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 83.

¹⁷ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 84.

¹⁸ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 85.

¹⁹ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 47; Save the Children, 2024, Women self-inducing labour and facing life-threatening complications in pregnancy after nine months of Gaza conflict, <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/women-self-inducing-labour-and-facing-life-threatening-complications-pregnancy-after-nine>.

postpartum haemorrhaging is routine.²⁰ One woman reportedly delayed a caesarean section for days due to lack of surgical supplies, risking her life and her pregnancy.²¹ Women recovering from childbirth have been discharged within a day due to bed shortages.²²

Menstruation, Breastfeeding and Childrearing Under Siege

23. As a result of the blockade that Israeli Forces have imposed on Gaza, thousands of Palestinian women and girls in Gaza lack access to menstrual products and hygiene, resorting to diapers, cloth scraps, or nothing at all—causing infections, shame, and mental suffering.²³ One girl told the United Nations Population Fund: “Every time my period comes, I wish I weren’t a girl”.²⁴
24. Likewise, those who have recently given birth face starvation, dehydration, and fear—conditions that prevent them from producing breast milk. According to the World Health Organization, “extreme fear and stress, malnutrition, and complex living conditions...have resulted in mothers being unable to breastfeed their new-born babies.”²⁵ Even where formula is available, water scarcity makes safe preparation impossible. Many mothers dilute formula or skip feedings altogether, placing newborns at risk of malnutrition.²⁶
25. Linking these patterns is the deliberate creation of an environment where performing basic reproductive (and gendered) roles — menstruating, giving birth, and nursing/feeding — become and unbearable sources of suffering. The loss of dignity in childbirth, the shame of unmanaged menstruation, the grief of watching a baby starve are specific, gendered modes of suffering with long-term consequences for mental and physical health. As such, they reflect a form of coercive violence in which gendered bodily functions become pathways to psychological and physical torment.

²⁰ Knell, Y., Tulley, C., 2025, BBC News, 'I begged for help, but only God answered': Growing dangers of pregnancy and childbirth in Gaza, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c626ljrp21yo>.

²¹ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, para. 47.

²² Knell, Y., Tulley, C., 2025, BBC News, 'I begged for help, but only God answered': Growing dangers of pregnancy and childbirth in Gaza, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c626ljrp21yo>.

²³ UNCOI Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Report – 2025, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/58/CRP.6, paras. 76-77; UNFPA, 2025, News release: From natural process to nightmare: How Gaza’s women and girls cope with their periods in a war zone, <https://www.unfpa.org/news/natural-process-nightmare-how-gaza%E2%80%99s-women-and-girls-cope-their-periods-war-zone>.

²⁴ UNFPA, 2025, News release: From natural process to nightmare: How Gaza’s women and girls cope with their periods in a war zone, <https://www.unfpa.org/news/natural-process-nightmare-how-gaza%E2%80%99s-women-and-girls-cope-their-periods-war-zone>.

²⁵ World Health Organization (WHO), 2024, Public health situations analysis: Hostilities in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), p. 14, <https://www.un.org/unispa/document/public-health-situation-analysis-on-hostilities-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-opt-02-may-2024-who-report/>.

²⁶ World Health Organization (WHO), 2024, Public health situations analysis: Hostilities in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), p. 14, <https://www.un.org/unispa/document/public-health-situation-analysis-on-hostilities-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-opt-02-may-2024-who-report/>; UN Women, 2024, Scarcity and fear: A gender analysis of the impact of the war in Gaza on vital services essential to women’s and girls’ health, safety, and dignity - water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), p. 7; Global Nutrition Cluster, 2024, Nutrition vulnerability and situation analysis – Gaza, pp. 9-10, <https://www.nutritioncluster.net/sites/nutritioncluster.com/files/2024-02/GAZA-Nutrition-vulnerability-and-SitAn-v7.pdf>.

RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS FOR THE STATE PARTY

26. To support its obligations under the Convention, the Committee should request that Israel:
- a) Clarify what measures have been taken to investigate, prosecute, punish, and prevent torture and ill-treatment of Palestinians from Gaza since 7 October 2023, particularly where such acts involved: Sexual violence; Forced nudity; Verbal threats of sexual assault; Reproductive and menstrual coercion; Digitally recording/documenting or sharing images of detainees' or their personal effects online.
 - b) Provide disaggregated data by sex, age, and location on:
 - i) The number of Palestinians detained during the ongoing military operation in Gaza;
 - ii) The number of allegations received and investigated, respectively, concerning torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including when it is gender-based or sexualized.
 - iii) The number of allegations that have resulted in prosecution and punishment, respectively.
 - c) Explain what protocols govern the treatment of Palestinian women and girls during arrest and detention, particularly with respect to: The conduct of strip searches and body cavity searches; Access to female officers; Menstrual hygiene and privacy; Reproductive care during detention; Protection from verbal and sexual harassment.
 - d) Explain what steps have been taken to prevent and discipline the digital documentation, circulation, and public display of degrading treatment against Palestinian detainees or home searches, including through social media and other online platforms.
 - e) Describe the mechanisms in place to ensure that reproductive health and dignity are protected for women and girls in Gaza, including:
 - i) Access to obstetric care;
 - ii) Provision of menstrual hygiene supplies in shelters and detention centers;
 - iii) Availability of water and nutrition for pregnant and lactating women;
 - iv) Specific accommodations for breastfeeding in displacement settings.
 - f) Explain how gender is integrated into training, oversight, and accountability mechanisms for Israeli Forces involved in operations in Gaza and the West Bank, including:
 - i) How personnel are trained to avoid gender-based violence and sexualized abuse;
 - ii) How gender-sensitive risk factors are identified and monitored during military or detention operations;
 - iii) Whether any units or individuals have been suspended, reprimanded, or held accountable for torture or ill-treatment, including when taking gendered or sexualized forms.
 - g) Describe how Israel ensures compliance with its obligations under the Convention Against Torture, specifically in relation to:

- i) Torture and ill-treatment committed for discriminatory purposes on the basis of gender;
- ii) The use of gendered norms to intentionally inflict physical or psychological suffering, or for purposes of punishment, intimidation, or discrimination.
- iii) The denial of sexual and reproductive health and rights as a means of punishment, intimidation, or coercion.