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UN experts say grounds to believe rape occurred in Hamas attack on Israel

Palestinian group has repeatedly denied allegations its fighters committed acts of sexual violence during the October 7 attack.



Pramila Patten, the United Nations special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, briefs the UN Security Council during a meeting on women, peace and security [Courtesy: United Nations]

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A team of United Nations experts has said there are “reasonable grounds to believe” sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, occurred during the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7.

Led by UN special envoy for sexual violence Pramila Patten, the team travelled to Israel between January 29 and February 14 and published a report with their findings on Monday.

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The Palestinian group Hamas, which governs Gaza, has [repeatedly denied](#) allegations its fighters committed acts of sexual violence during the attacks.

“Credible circumstantial information, which may be indicative of some forms of sexual violence, including genital mutilation, sexualised torture, or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, was also gathered,” read the 24-page UN report.

“The mission team found clear and convincing information that some hostages taken to Gaza have been subjected to various forms of conflict-related sexual violence and has reasonable grounds to believe that such violence may be ongoing,” the report also said.

The report comes nearly five months after the October 7 attacks, which killed at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official Israeli figures. Around 250 others were taken hostage during the attack.

Israel’s war on Gaza has since devastated the besieged territory, killing more than 30,500 people, according to Palestinian health authorities, and displacing more than 80 percent of the population. The UN says a quarter of Gaza’s 2.3 million people face

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However, they did hold 33 meetings with Israeli institutions and conducted interviews with 34 people including survivors and witnesses of that day’s attacks, released captives, and health providers.

Patten said the team found “that several fully naked or partially naked bodies from the waist down were recovered – mostly women – with hands tied and shot multiple times, often in the head”.

While circumstantial, she said it could be “indicative of some forms of sexual violence”.

On Road 232 – the road to leave the Nova music festival, which was part of the attacks and was located on grounds neighbouring Gaza – “credible information based on witness accounts describe an incident of the rape of two women by armed elements”, Patten said.

Patten said that in kibbutz Re’im, the team verified the rape of a woman outside a bomb shelter.

At Kibbutz Be’eri, Patten said, her team “was able to determine that at least two allegations of sexual violence widely repeated in the media were unfounded due to either new superseding information or inconsistency in the facts gathered.”

Other reported rapes couldn’t be verified during the team’s time in Israel.

The experts said a “fully-fledged investigation” would be required to establish more details about the magnitude of sexual violence that may have occurred that day.



The UN team said it also received information from civil society sources and direct interviews, about “sexual violence against Palestinian men and women in [Israeli] detention settings, during house raids and at checkpoints” after October 7.

The UN envoy raised these allegations with the Israeli Ministry of Justice and Military Advocate General, which said no complaints of sexual violence against members of the Israeli military had been received.