



## **Media Coverage concerning Child and Adolescent Hostages following their anticipated Release or Rescue from Gaza: Recommendations and Guidelines for the Media**

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This document seeks to guide media outlets and journalists in the anticipated event where children and adolescents who were kidnapped on October 7th, 2023, will be released by the terrorist organizations holding them, or will be rescued by security forces.

Firstly, we acknowledge that there is a public interest in reliable and up-to-date coverage of the kidnapped minors held in Gaza and their condition, including following their release or rescue. We further realize that reporting this information is important both diplomatically and legally, within Israel and outside its borders. **Nevertheless, media coverage of kidnapped minors who will hopefully be released or rescued from Gaza is highly complex and sensitive and may have very harmful long-term consequences for the victims' physical and emotional rehabilitation, as well as for their privacy and dignity. Therefore, media outlets and journalists must refrain from reporting any detail that may bring further trauma upon a minor or their family and must put the victims' best interests before any other consideration.** To this end, based on professional experience in Israel and internationally, we have put together the following guidelines and recommendations.

Special thanks to Dr. Jonathan Piamenta for his professional guidance in putting together these recommendations.

### **A. Main issues regarding media coverage of children and adolescents released or rescued from Gaza**

#### A.1. Guaranteeing reporting that is respectful and sensitive of the child and their family

- It is crucial to refrain from using graphic language when describing the kidnapped child's experiences. When events, experiences or conditions in captivity must be reported, no reference should be made to specific children.
- Images, video or audio of a graphic nature, or which depict abusive, or crisis situations of captive children should not be used. When such situations must be reported, no reference should be made to specific children.
- No suggestion of blame or assignment of responsibility to the child or their family should be alluded to, whether with regard to their kidnapping, the conditions of their captivity, the manner in which they were released or rescued, or their behavior and challenges following their release.
- A 'trigger warning' should be posted before content that may be difficult to read, view or

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<sup>1</sup> This document was published and disseminated to media outlets prior to the release of some of the hostages in November 2023.

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listen to with regard to kidnapped children and adolescents. Such content should not be broadcast at times of the day when children and adolescents typically view programming, nor should it be broadcast in programs or media that target minors.

#### A.2. Guaranteeing the privacy of the child and their family

- Content related to the events and conditions in captivity of kidnapped children and adolescents should, as much as possible, not be made public in a manner that could lead to the identification of the child or their family (e.g. names, likenesses, clothing, or other identifying features).

#### A.3. Interviews of kidnapped children

- Attempts to interview kidnapped children and adolescents should be avoided in the immediate and short-term period following their release or rescue. The exposure itself and discussion of the difficult experience can cause suffering, pain, and additional trauma. Moreover, kidnapped children and adolescents may experience “survivor’s guilt” (for example, for not having saved others, or for being released or rescued while family or friends remain in captivity) and need time to process their experience.

In addition, trauma experienced by children and adolescents may make it difficult for them to coherently relate what they have been through. Younger children may have been manipulated by their captors, in a manner that influenced their memories. It is therefore imperative that kidnapped children and adolescents receive professional emotional support, and that they be given time to process their experiences with the guidance of professionals and close family. Interviews with the media at such a time may harm them and lead to a narrative that has not been properly processed.<sup>4</sup>

When a reasonable amount of time has elapsed following release or rescue, and once the child and their family have received the proper emotional assistance from professionals, and have consulted them on this topic, the possibility of interviews can be broached. In general, it is our opinion that young children should not be interviewed. Kidnapped adolescents should be interviewed only after written consent is obtained from both the teen and their parents. The interview must take place in a protected environment and adhere to designated ethical protocols.

#### A.4. Providing support and assistance to the public and the wider audience

- When reporting the release or rescue of a kidnapped child or adolescent, it is recommended that a number of details be included in order to relieve public anxiety and concern, as long as these details are available and have been verified (e.g. that the child or adolescent has been reunited with their family).
- When reporting on kidnapped children or adolescents, it is recommended that contact details be provided for emotional support services for the public, and especially for minors (e.g. government, civil or professional agencies with support hotlines).

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to differentiate between media interviews and interviews conducted for security or legal purposes. In general, in security or legal interviews, the interviewer must be a professional trained in speaking with children in trauma situations (e.g. child investigator specialists). The interview conducted must be distinctly professional, and the process and its findings must not publicly expose the child or adolescent concerned. In any case, such interviews should, as much as possible, be avoided in the immediate and short term following release or rescue, and - when necessary - be carried out in accordance with designated protocols.



## **B. The effects of media coverage of traumatized children and adolescents**

- The basic premises are that children and adolescents who were kidnapped witnessed extremely traumatic events, including brutal acts committed against their family and friends during the attack. Most have suffered the loss of close family members, and some have been orphaned. Moreover, in most cases, these children and adolescents are unable to return to their homes and their personal belongings (such as toys, clothes, and photos) were damaged or destroyed.
- Kidnapped children and adolescents were held for many weeks by terrorist organizations. The scope of the trauma they experienced during that time is unknown at this stage, and may include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, social isolation, and deprivation of basic necessities (such as food, water, medical treatment, sleep, etc.).
- In light of this difficult trauma, these children and adolescents will need the strong support of their families, communities, and professionals to protect them from media exposure and the outside world, especially in the period after their release from captivity. This support will enable them to focus on receiving the medical and emotional care they need, and to resume their family routines as much as possible.
- Publishing information, including photos, videos or audio segments of children and adolescents who were kidnapped and taken into Gaza and then released or rescued, or interviewing them, risks worsening their trauma and severely harming their emotional and physical rehabilitation in both the immediate and long term. It must be noted that it is possible that some of these children were photographed or filmed in captivity in Gaza by their captors for propaganda purposes and/or as part of their abuse. It is therefore possible that they will display heightened sensitivity to cameras and photography equipment following their release or rescue.
- Certain questions or treatment may be perceived by the child or adolescent as offensive, invasive, and embarrassing in a way that compounds existing trauma. In addition, photos, videos and audio segments showing the child or adolescent upon release or rescue, or in the immediate aftermath, may become imprinted on public consciousness for years to follow, which will plague the victims for the rest of their lives and impact their ability to go back to their daily lives.
- The emotions experienced by the child and their family, especially in the immediate aftermath of their release or rescue, may make them especially vulnerable to inappropriate exposure and even exploitation for media purposes. In their emotional state, it is inherently difficult for them to understand the possible implications of media exposure and/or consent to it.
- Media outlets and journalists are responsible for explaining this situation to their audiences, and to explain the considerations weighed in their decision not to expose information about kidnapped children and adolescents following their anticipated release or rescue. The purpose is to increase public awareness of the sensitivity of this issue, and to ensure that the privacy of these young victims is respected.