



# Gang Rapes and Sexual Violence in Israel

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President

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Last week the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia wrote to Mr Ron Gerstenfeld (Deputy Chief of Mission at the Israel Embassy in Australia) and Mr Chris Canaan (Ambassador at the Australian Embassy in Israel) calling on the Israeli Government to

- Ensure appropriate services are available to support all victims of sexual violence, independent of whether the violence takes place in public or private;
- Ensure that perpetrators are promptly brought before the Courts and punished according to law; and
- Introduce educational and other measures to reorient the society to ensure that women are deeply valued and respected members of the society.

At this point we have not had a response but are hoping that Jewish women of Australia will be able to offer support to our sisters in Israel in achieving safety and justice.

The body of our correspondence read:

We have watched, from afar, the unfolding stories of two horrific gang rapes involving Israeli teenagers and young adults. The gang rapes in Cyprus and in Eilat are deeply troubling. Sexual violence against women is never acceptable and these incidents betray a deep lack of respect for women and girls in Israel.

The women of Israel, and many men as well as corporate bodies, have come out to express their anger and dismay that women are so devalued. Thousands of people have come out to demonstrate and demand that the government take action. Indeed, President Reuven Rivlin has said that the rapes are indicative of the destruction of boundaries that hold civilisation together. There is no doubt an erosion of the valuing of women when such instances occur. The Jewish women of Australia feel equally strongly about these issues and seek to understand what action is being taken.

During the period of COVID-19 there has been a dramatic increase in the incidence of domestic violence. Women are often at greater risk from someone known to them, someone who may even be an intimate partner. It is estimated that there are 30% more cases of family violence in the current climate. As it is now recognised that the failure to provide a Get and economic deprivation are also forms of violence, these issues must be seen as part of the problem to be addressed.

We also made it clear that we appreciate that Israel is not alone in experiencing these problems, but we also consider that this is no excuse for not responding to this problem with the urgency which is being demanded by the people of Israel.