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Kristof column alleging Israeli abuse of Palestinian prisoners sparks outrage, scrutiny and debate among Jews

The New York Times column details allegations of sexual abuse in Israeli prisons.



The New York Times building is seen in New York City on January 22, 2026. (Screenshot/ANGELA WEISS / AFP via Getty Images)

By [Grace Gilson](#) May 13, 2026

A New York Times column by Nicholas Kristof published Monday detailed graphic allegations of sexual abuse of Palestinian prisoners by Israeli guards, amplifying claims that guards had used dogs to rape Palestinian detainees.

As the allegations in [the column](#), “The Silence That Meets the Rape of Palestinians,” sparked a widening online debate over their credibility, Jewish groups and leaders began weighing in with a mix of condemnation, skepticism and concern over conditions in Israeli prisons.

Israel has rejected all of the allegations in Kristof’s column, which included claims that guards inserted objects into Palestinian detainees’ rectums, beat detainees’ genitals and

subjected them to systematic humiliation. The Israeli Foreign Ministry described his writing as “one of the worst blood libels ever to appear in the modern press.”

“In an unfathomable inversion of reality, and through an endless stream of baseless lies, propagandist Nicholas Kristof turns the victim into the accused,” the ministry [said in a statement](#), adding that the country would “fight these lies with the truth – and the truth will prevail.”

Several progressive Jewish groups and Israeli human rights organizations welcomed the scrutiny the column has placed on Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. But many others in the Jewish community have expressed outrage over reporting they consider dubious and agenda-driven.

The American Jewish Committee echoed the foreign ministry’s condemnation, calling the allegation that Israel trains dogs to rape prisoners a “[modern-day blood libel](#),” a reference to [historic antisemitic myths](#) accusing Jews of ritual murder.

“Allegations of abuse toward Palestinians deserve serious, rigorous investigation,” the AJC continued. “Yet this piece, while opinion, appeared to be presented as an investigative report and fell alarmingly short of that standard while amplifying inflammatory narratives that have real-world consequences in a time of surging hatred toward Israelis and Jews worldwide.”

One of the most widely circulated allegations from the piece came from an anonymous Palestinian journalist, who said Israeli guards had ordered a dog to mount and penetrate him while he was blindfolded and handcuffed. The column also cited conversations with over a dozen former Palestinian detainees, who described sexual abuse or humiliation by Israeli settlers or security forces.

In the wake of the column’s publication, some pro-Israel voices are renewing their campaign against The New York Times, which they believe is biased against Israel. Pro-Israel groups, including EndJewHatred, Stop Antizionism, Hineni and the Movement Against Antizionism, are planning a protest outside the newspaper’s New York City headquarters on Thursday.

Michelle Ahdoot, EndJewHatred’s director of programming and strategy, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the column had been “hurtful and angering,” adding that she believed it was “direct cause of true incitement and violence against the Jewish people.”

“We’ve been calling on The New York Times and other media sources to stop the lies and stop the incitement that’s a result of this horrific reporting, and this, frankly, was the straw that broke the camel’s back,” she said.

The column's critics, who also include a handful of Palestinian voices who have previously condemned Hamas, have pointed to Kristof's reliance on a report issued by an NGO that Israel has alleged for more than a decade serves as a Hamas propaganda operation.

While Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, a Palestinian writer and advocate in the United States, wrote that he had "no doubt" that "incidents of sexual abuse have occurred in Israeli prisons," he criticized the sourcing used in Kristof's piece, writing in a [post on X](#) that Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, a Geneva-based NGO, and others have "troubling records on accuracy, conduct, and associations."

"They are not credible sources, even if the article relied on others as well," Alkhatib wrote. He said that other Palestinian testimonies were "anonymous due to shame and fear of retaliation for reporting sexual torture, which complicates verification but does not automatically invalidate their claims."

Simone Rodan-Benzaquen, the senior envoy for Europe at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, similarly criticized Kristof's use of Euro-Med's report in a [post on X](#). Euro-Med's leaders have long drawn accusations from Israel of being Hamas operatives, and the NGO has faced scrutiny for referring to the Israeli hostages taken by Hamas as having been "[arrested and moved to the Gaza Strip](#)" and for claiming that Israel [steals the organs of deceased Palestinians](#).

"This is not a human rights organization with a bias," Rodan-Benzaquen wrote. "It is an organization whose leadership has documented family and organizational ties to Hamas, operating under institutional cover at the heart of our democracies, and is cited by the @nytimes."

Hen Mazzig, an Israeli activist, also maligned Kristof's citation of a tweet by Shaiel Ben-Ephraim in a [Substack post](#), pointing out that he [left UCLA amid accusations of sexual harassment](#) in 2020. (Ben-Ephraim has acknowledged that he engaged in "[inappropriate behavior](#)" at the time.)

Ben-Ephraim's [viral tweet](#) from April, which Kristof linked to in his claim that Israel had trained dogs to rape Palestinian detainees, listed a series of alleged testimonies from Palestinians' unnamed Israeli guards who claimed they had experienced or seen the practice.

"The accusations against Israeli settlers and security officials deserve serious investigation," Mazzig wrote, later adding, "But if you are willing to platform a man accused of sexual harassment, and an organization that calls Jewish rape allegations propaganda, to make your case on the same topic, the conversation is over."

Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister, told the [Free Press](#) that his comments in the column appearing to validate the allegations appeared out of context. Many have also questioned the timing of Kristof's column, coming just a day before a widely anticipated report from an Israeli civil commission about the [extent of sexual violence](#) during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Neither The New York Times nor Kristof responded to questions from JTA. But a spokesperson for the newspaper, Charlie Stadlander, defended the column and its author late Tuesday, [writing](#) online about a viral claim that it could be retracted, "There is no truth to this at all."

On Wednesday morning, he also rejected claims that Kristof's column had been timed in relation to the [Oct. 7 sexual violence report](#), which he said the Times had not known about before its release. The newspaper covered the report late Tuesday.

Kristof, too, has waved off concerns, [dismissing criticism](#) that the piece ran in the Times' opinion section rather than its news pages. He also greeted skepticism about the possibility of training dogs for sexual assault with ["exasperation."](#)

"I appreciate the intense interest in my column," Kristof wrote in a [post on X](#). "For skeptics, why not agree on Red Cross and lawyer visits for the 9,000 Palestinian 'security' prisoners? If you think these abuse allegations are false, such monitoring visits would be protective. So why not?"

Allegations of abuse against Palestinian detainees in Israel surfaced repeatedly before and during the war in Gaza, including in testimonies by detainees and prison guards by [Reuters](#) and the [Associated Press](#), albeit not necessarily in as much detail as many of the cases described in Kristof's piece. In January, reports obtained by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel from the country's Public Defender's Office found evidence of widespread, systematic abuse in Israeli prisons against Palestinians.

In March, Israeli military prosecutors canceled indictments against five IDF reserve soldiers who were accused of [sexually assaulting a detainee](#) at the Sde Teiman detention facility, a case that was caught on video and sparked international outcry.

And in January, an Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, released a report alleging sexual abuse in Israeli prisons. The group cited the column in a [post on X](#) Tuesday, writing that "the international community continues to stand by and allow Israel to commit crimes against the Palestinian people" even as the column and others report on them.

Kristof's column is indeed prompting some to give new attention to the conditions in Israeli prisons, its ostensible purpose. Some Jewish critics of the column are emphasizing that

they find the broad allegation of abuse in Israeli prisons plausible, troubling and deserving of scrutiny and action. Many point to comments [boasting of poor conditions in prisons](#) by Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right minister who has overseen the Israel Prison Service since late 2022, to say they believe that abuse may have worsened, and the consequences diminished, in recent years.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, head of the liberal Zionist advocacy and lobby group J Street, wrote on [Substack](#) that while “disputed” details in the piece must be “rigorously investigated,” the report’s “serious allegations of systemic abuse cannot simply be waved away because they are painful or politically inconvenient.”

The Nexus Project, a liberal-leaning antisemitism watchdog, took aim at the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s assessment of the column, writing in a [post on X](#) that “to weaponize the term ‘blood libel’ to dismiss Kristof’s thorough reporting is dangerous.”

Other progressive Jewish groups have also called for the allegations in the piece to be investigated, including the rabbinic group T’ruah, which [demanded](#) “an impartial independent investigation, so the perpetrators can be brought to justice.”

Elissa Wald, a Jewish activist living in Oregon, argued in a [Substack essay](#) late Monday that while she believed The New York Times had a “strong anti-Israel bias,” many things could be true at once.

“The wide[s]pread, knee-jerk denial of everything Kristof wrote by many of my fellow Jews is incredibly troubling to me,” she wrote, adding, “Just as we don’t know enough to immediately believe everything written in this piece, especially given the context we’re all familiar with, I also don’t think we know enough to immediately discount and dismiss it all.”

Others worried that Kristof’s approach might set back the effort to get to the bottom of these allegations. Israeli policy analyst and pro-Israel influencer Eli Kowaz argued in [a Substack post](#) that Kristof had foregrounded the most sensational allegations in his piece and neglected claims that were more documented, including Ben-Gvir’s rhetoric and [a recent report by the Israeli Public Defender’s Office](#) documenting systematic violence from prison guards.

“By Thursday, the conversation will be about Euro-Med’s credibility and whether unverified accounts can be trusted,” Kowaz wrote. “The documented case — the one that required no advocacy org, no anonymous source, no unverifiable claim — will be largely beside the point. That is what this kind of journalism costs, and someone should say so.”