Captivity survivor Omer Wenkert: For 505 days, I was starved, humiliated, and beaten

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Released hostage Omer Wenkert spoke Saturday night at a rally at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv, describing the inhumane conditions under which Hamas kept him and other hostages.

"I was returned to life about a month and a half ago. But I'm not really here, only half of me stands here," Wenkert said. "Part of me is still captive in a tunnel. Like my fellow returnees, I am also going through physical and emotional rehabilitation these days. I know that my true rehabilitation will be when my beloved brothers Guy and Evyatar board a helicopter, walk into the room where their loved ones are waiting, and they will be home in Israel again."

He continued, "I was kidnapped from a shelter where 28 young men and women were murdered, including my best friend, my sunshine who became my guardian angel - Kim Damti."

"In captivity, I was held in extreme conditions in a narrow tunnel with a waste pit beside me. For 505 days I was starved, humiliated, beaten. Of those, I was alone for 197 days and nearly lost my sanity.

"The word freedom sounds grand, but it is also simple: to be with family. To wake up in the morning with peace in your heart. To know you are free to dream, to hug, to love, to laugh, to cry – without fear. Freedom is the most basic value of a state born out of yearning for freedom. Guy and Evyatar - be strong for yourselves and for me. I promise you and all the hostages - we will not give up. You are coming back!"

Hamas captivity survivor Liri Albag said, "When the first deal collapsed, I collapsed too. I remember that moment when everything that kept us going – shattered. We were sure we were going home. We were sure this nightmare was over. The doors didn't open. And the nightmare continued. In one moment I lost trust in the outside world. Trust that someone really remembers us. Trust that we would ever get out of there."

"While we are here – they are going through hell there! A year and a half of torture and physical, mental, psychological – and even sexual violence! They threatened to cut off our hands if they discovered we lied to them or did something forbidden. They forbade us from crying, forbade us from hugging each other, forbade us from listening to one another in moments of crisis. They are going through a year and a half of hunger, uncertainty, pain. A year and a half in constant fear.

"This week is Passover – the holiday of freedom. But what freedom is there when 59 people are still in Hamas' hell? I remember Passover there, a sad holiday, we were alone. The most family-oriented holiday we spent far from home. They made us work there! We were their servants!

"And now the holiday of freedom has arrived. And our brothers and sisters are still there. They sit there, in dark tunnels, without food, without water, alone, helpless, not knowing if they have a tomorrow. Any return to fighting endangers them! If these are orders from Hamas senior ranks – the hostages are the first to pay the price! If the Air Force attacks – sadly then too the hostages are in danger! We are one people, one heart – and we leave no one behind!"

Gadi Moses, who was also released in the deal with Hamas, said: "In about a week, we will celebrate Passover – the holiday of freedom. This year, the meaning of my freedom is much deeper. After 482 days in captivity by Islamic Jihad, I am free again among my family and my people."

"The drums of war echo in my ears again. I was there and heard these sounds from the other side of the border too. It's terrible and frightening! It chokes the throat and paralyzes the soul. Our captive brothers lose all hope when the sounds of shells whistle from every side.

"The hostages' time is not unlimited. There are sick ones, wounded ones, desperate ones, and those who are mentally injured.

"As a people, we are committed to them both morally and in our values. They are our brothers who were murdered and kidnapped as free citizens in a democratic state, or soldiers who went to defend the country. We must not abandon them in their time of distress. There is a great danger of more hostages dying and a danger of some of our dead hostages disappearing. Stop the war and bring everyone back now!"

Amit Bendor-Gus, friend of Edan Alexander, who is still held hostage in Gaza, said: "President Trump, when you were elected, you made the smart choice of bringing along your talented friend, Steve Witkoff. Being the good friend that he is, he is traveling around from Israel, to Egypt, to Qatar. I also have a good friend, a best friend, and his name is Edan Alexander. And normally he is there for me. But now, he is stuck. Underground. In tunnels. With no sunlight, water, or food. And he isn't in a position where he could ask for help."

"Within a little over 70 days, since your inauguration President Trump, and even before it, you managed to negotiate the release of a great number of hostages in the first phase of the ceasefire. You brought countless innocent hostages back home to their families.

"We need to bring back an American-Israeli citizen, Edan Alexander, and the other remaining 58 hostages home. That would be a success. That would be a Passover miracle."

Herut Nimrodi, mother of Tamir Nimrodi, who is also held hostage in Gaza, added: "Ironically, my name is Herut ('freedom' in Hebrew). I was born at a time of year when we mark a sequence of events in Jewish history that shaped us as a people. When the Jewish people emerged from darkness to light. Passover, Holocaust Remembrance Day, Independence Day. My parents, in their innocence, thought, what could be more fitting than 'Herut'?"

"Where is our freedom? Where is my freedom? Where is the freedom of my Tamir? Where is the freedom of 58 more hostages and their families? Where is the freedom of our people? We are here tonight, just steps away from another Seder night without our children. Another holiday with no joy. Only pain, longing, and deep concern for our loved ones. For a year and a half, we have been crying out and our children are still languishing in Hamas tunnels."