

Inside the Kibbutz where the massacre took place. Nadav: “My parents were kidnapped. They believed in peace and worked for peace all their lives”

“My name is **Nadav Kipnis**. My parents, Eviatar and Lilach, were kidnapped in Be'eri on Saturday morning. They and I and my brother are all Italian and Israeli citizens. I have more family who were kidnapped, and they are my uncle and my aunt on my mother's side and their daughter, who is my cousin, her husband and their two children, who are three and eight, along with my uncle's sister and her daughter, who is 12.” Nadav speaks slowly but with clarity: “I'm feeling very emotional,” he says over the phone, “so I apologise if I'm not speaking clearly, but I'm sure you'll understand the words that are coming from my heart.” Speaking to SIR, he tries to recall the dramatic morning of Saturday 7 October, when Hamas terrorists stormed several kibbutzim near the border with the Gaza Strip. 

Among them, Be'eri Kibbutz, just over 1,000 residents, became the scene of a massacre, leaving over a hundred slaughtered bodies on the ground. “My parents – says Navdav - live in Kibbutz Be'eri, my mother was born there. She is a social worker, while my father for the last nine years was struggling with an autoimmune disease. He is an artist and an amazing person that sadly these last years didn't work, as he worked on his health. My relationship to Italy is through my grandmother on my father's side, who was born in Italy. My grandmother's family came from Livorno, they moved to Tunisia and from there they went to live in Israel.” **What happened on the morning of Saturday, October 7? Can you reconstruct the fact?** On Saturday morning, the terrorists attacked many kibbutzim, specifically Be'eri kibbutz. I wasn't there. We tried to contact my parents and understand what was happening. We knew that they were in the 'safe room' in their house, which is supposed to be very strong and resistant to rocket attacks. The last contact we had with them was with my father. As I said, he has a carer because of his illness. The carer called his wife and she heard him say that the Hamas terrorists were trying to open the door and that was the last time we had any contact with them. After that we heard about all the atrocities that were happening in the kibbutz. We have this application that helps us to stay in touch without WhatsApp. **What was the content of the messages being sent via this App?** People were sending messages that their houses were being burnt, that they needed help, that they were seeing people being shot and people being kidnapped, asking for help and so on. At the same time, some terrorists uploaded a video of my parents' neighbourhood showing people being dragged away. We assume that my parents and the rest of my relatives suffered the same fate. We also tried to locate their phones and saw that my mother's phone was not in Be'eri. Someone used my father's phone to call some people and then deleted several WhatsApp groups. As for my uncle, people tried to call him and someone answered and said in an Arabic accent, “kidnap Gilad Shalit” (the Israeli soldier captured by Hamas in 2006 and released in 2011 in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinians held in Israeli jails, *Ed.'s note*).



Based on this information, we immediately assumed that they had been kidnapped. A few days ago we learned that 108 people in the Kibbutz were dead and to date we have not been notified that they are that they are among the deceased. The last thing we know for sure is that someone who survived the attack reported that my cousin's husband was seen being tied in ropes and taken away, so we assume that they were all kidnapped and the last thing we know is that the houses were burned and are empty, there were no dead bodies in them. **Do you know the other people kidnapped in the Kibbutz?** The Kibbutz is a very small community. Be'eri in particular is considered a large community, we are about a thousand people and we know all the faces of everyone there. I grew up there since I was young, I know all the faces and all the people who were kidnapped, but specifically 11 members of my family were kidnapped. **Living on the border with Gaza, constantly being targeted with rockets, did you have any premonition that something serious, such a murderous fury could break out? Did you expect such a serious act of terrorism?** When we woke up to the alarms in Beersheva on Saturday, we thought it was a "normal occurrence" of being bombarded by rockets, and we thought, ok, everything is fine. I texted my parents that it was nothing serious, and we didn't watch the news. When we started to realise what was going on and what was happening in the chat groups, we couldn't believe it. I don't think anyone in their right mind could have any idea of the horror and the extent of the atrocities. Terrorists murdering babies in front of their parents and murdering parents in front of their babies.

The last time that happened in the history of humanity that my people can remember was the Holocaust.

I don't think this is something anyone could ever imagine in their worst dreams. I can't even tell you how it feels to know that children who used to be in my house, who used to play with me, are now dead... **There is much talk about security breach in Israel. How could this happen?** I'm not a politician, I trust my government. I know that the issue of security is now at the top of the agenda and that everyone was caught by surprise. None of this had been foreseen. I think this is very similar to 9/11 when no one expected the attacks and many people were killed and murdered by terrorists. I believe that the government will do everything in its power to ensure our safety and to bring back the hostages. I think that is the best thing to do. **What is your government doing to save the lives of your relatives, your parents and the other people who have been kidnapped, both Israeli and non-Israeli citizens?** At the moment my country is at war. We can't talk to Hamas, Hamas won't talk to us. That's why we turned to the Italian government, because we are Italian citizens, and to the Catholic Church in Rome. Because you have influence. You can talk to Hamas, and you can talk to organisations that have a moral compass and that can help my parents, my father, who is ill, and try to get them out safely and without harm. We don't have the power, but we want you to know the whole story, to tell you about my father's disability, so that you can convince the authorities to help us and save innocent people who have been kidnapped for no good reason. **What do you think is the best way to bring all the hostages home safe and sound?** I do not know. I'm not trained in negotiations or diplomacy. All I can say is that I think the next top priority, other than the safety of the people, is to get everyone back safely. I don't know how to do that. But the best thing that can be done at the moment is to make sure that they're not harmed and that they get home safely, because at the moment we have no idea what's happening to them. We don't know if they're alive, we don't

know how they're being treated. But we have seen what these people, the terrorists, have done in the houses, murdering and raping women... I can't even try to imagine, and I don't want to imagine, what is happening to the hostages. My only hope is that members of the Catholic Church, with whom we share moral and ethical values, who want to help us, can persuade people, perhaps with some common sense, to treat these people well and send them back home. **You said that you are also an Italian citizen. Do you trust the Italian state at the moment? Minister Tajani says that Italy's "absolute priority" is to free our compatriots held by Hamas.** I have to say that one thing that has actually given me some hope and some stability in these difficult times is the Italian government. They contacted me almost a day after the embassy contacted me, a day after the atrocity. They asked about my safety and my family. And just yesterday morning, Tajani himself called me from Egypt to say that he's doing his best to protect the citizens and my family, and it really gives me hope that Italy is doing its best and is working in a moral way and is choosing the right side to help and manage this.

I also believe that the Catholic Church is doing everything it can. Jews and Christians share the same Holy Book.

We may have some different beliefs, but we have the same moral values and we believe in the sanctity of life and humanity. And we know that the other side, Hamas, shows by its heinous actions that it does not have the same values. And I really hope that someone can help and press for the safety, the truth, the dignity and the life of the hostages. **Israel is preparing a ground operation in Gaza. Do you think it could be very risky for the hostages?** I fear for their safety because, as I said, we can't trust Hamas to be kind. At the moment my relatives are in the hands of people who are celebrating death, parading dead bodies through the streets, spitting on them and cheering death, so I am very worried about their safety. I really don't know what the right answer is, but I trust the Israeli government to do the right thing. The last time we saw such violence was with ISIS - not just Jews, but in general - and at that time the world came together to destroy that organisation. It took a long time, but justice finally prevailed. I think Europe should take the same action to deal with these murderous people. Today we saw that in another kibbutz that was attacked, ISIS flags were found on the body of a Hamas terrorist. We know that they are connected. They are the same people, born of the same organism. **By attacking so many kibbutzim, the terrorists have targeted a symbol of Israel's history: this attack has a double, tragic meaning...** I agree with you. But I think that no matter who the terrorists had attacked, it would have been the same tragedy. I only represent my family and the place where I grew up. Obviously, the kibbutz is a very important part of our history, people came to these kibbutzim from all over the world. With regard to my parents, they are peaceful people. My mother worked for peace with other Palestinian citizens, not with Hamas terrorists. There's a difference with other Arabs who want peace.



My

father, who learned Arabic, also believed deeply in peace. They both worked for peace. We lived peacefully in our community, believing in these values, and we never thought that something like this could happen anywhere. I think it is a double tragedy: the fact that such terrible things could happen to such peaceful people. **Do you have any faith in the possibility of Israelis and Palestinians living together and the end of the conflict?** Hamas has shown that it cannot be part of that dream. But right now I think we have to focus on the attacks and how to end the ongoing conflict and save the people. I want peace. My parents believe in peace and they taught me to believe in peace. I am a hopeful person that one day it will happen. But right now, the focus should be on stopping the atrocities that are happening and condemning those who have committed them without mercy for their actions.

Daniele Rocchi