

Thousands Cheer the Release of Israeli Hostages at 'Hostages Square' in Tel Aviv

Thousands of Israelis gathered at "Hostages Square" in Tel Aviv to celebrate the release of the three Israeli women held captive in Gaza for over 15 months.

As a screen displayed the image of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Spokesman Brig. Gen. Daniel Hagari saying, "They are in our hands," the crowd erupted in cheers and clapping.

There were chants in the crowd, "Romi is coming back! Emily is coming back! Doron is coming back!" as footage showed the Red Cross vehicles carrying the three women to meet with the IDF personnel who would receive and return them back to Israel.

Groups of people were seen dancing, shouting, and holding up posters with images of the three women.

Many in the crowd released yellow balloons to match the yellow ribbons worn by many over the last year.

The crowds began to chant for the release of all the hostages, "Everyone – now!"

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Even families whose loved ones are still in captivity came out to celebrate the release of the three women, including Einav Zangauker, mother of hostage Matan Zangauker, who has become a central figure in the protests calling for a hostage release deal.

The IDF released a video showing the families of the hostages reacting with joy when they were informed the three had

successfully been received by Israeli troops.

After their safe return to Israeli territory, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said, "Their return today represents a beacon of light in the darkness, a moment of hope and triumph of the human spirit. For their families and for all of us, this is a moment that will be forever etched in our memory.

"Their return reminds us of our profound responsibility to continue working toward the release of everyone – until the last hostage returns home," the statement said.

Near the military post where the women would be received in Israel, crowds stood along the road, holding Israeli flags and signs saying, "Welcome home!"

After a brief preliminary medical exam, the women were taken to Safra Children's Hospital at the Tel haShomer Medical Center near Tel Aviv, where they were warmly greeted by hospital staff, and received by waiting family members.

Crowds waiting outside the hospital held banners welcoming the released hostages back home. Even other patients at the hospital tried to catch a glimpse of the three women as they were brought inside to meet their family members.

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Some of the friends of Emily Damari gathered outside the hospital, holding a banner welcoming her, draped in Israeli flags, and dancing as all the released hostages arrived.

In New York City's Central Park, a similar celebration took place, as thousands gathered with Israeli flags, pictures of the three released women, and signs celebrating their release.

Israel's national airline, El Al, announced the release of the hostages on its airline flights, where the news was met with

cheering and clapping.

At the same time, there were mixed emotions – relief at seeing the women return home after 15 months in captivity, but also concern over the costs of the hostage release ceasefire deal.

Shlomi Elkayam, a businessman from Sderot told Reuters, “We have been waiting for this for a long time. We wanted it to be an absolute victory, I hope we get that absolute victory, if not now then later.

“There are pros and cons, but in the end we are tired of it all. We are tired and we want everyone here at home,” Elkayam said.

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