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UMD community members gather at Hillel on one-year anniversary of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack

Katharine Wilson · October 8, 2024



Rabbi Ari Koretzky bows his head during a vigil on Oct. 7, 2024, honoring hostages taken by Hamas. (Neelay Sachdeva/The Diamondback)

University of Maryland students and community members gathered outside Maryland Hillel Monday night to remember victims of Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

More than 1,100 people attended the vigil, according to Rabbi Ari Israel, who is also Hillel's executive director. Attendees sang, prayed and delivered speeches about people killed in Israel and the impact Hamas' attack has had on students at this university.

Monday marked one year since Hamas killed more than 1,200 people and took about 250 more hostage in an attack on Israel. Oct. 7, 2023, was the deadliest attack on Jewish people since the Holocaust, the Associated Press reported.

Many attendees wore t-shirts with the words “Never Forget 10.7.2023” as they joined the growing crowd, which included university and local leaders. Students picked up candles and stood around a temporary stage outside Hillel, a center for Jewish student life across the street from this university’s campus.

University of Maryland Police blocked a section of Mowatt Lane, which included the front of Hillel, to vehicle traffic during the vigil.

Speakers at the vigil included Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), this university’s student affairs vice president Patty Perillo, religious leaders and representatives from Jewish student groups on campus.



Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) speaks during a vigil on Oct. 7, 2024, honoring hostages that had been taken by Hamas militants. (Giuseppe LoPiccolo/The Diamondback)



Patty Perillo, this university’s Vice President for Student Affairs, speaks during a vigil on Oct. 7, 2024, honoring hostages that had been taken by Hamas militants. (Giuseppe LoPiccolo/The Diamondback)

Stone Schwartz, this university’s Jewish Student Union president, said he didn’t want to get out of bed Monday morning, but felt a responsibility to show up for the campus’ Jewish community. The Oct. 7, 2023, attack changed his life, he said.

“I remember exactly where I was. I remember what I was doing, what was going through my mind,” Schwartz, a junior mechanical engineering major, said.

Emma Steinhouse, this university’s Jewish Student Union vice president, said in a speech at the vigil that many Jewish community members have faced “horrors no one should ever have to know” over the past year.

But Steinhouse said she is “grateful” to be part of the campus’ Jewish community. Many community members have come together to cope with the grief, the junior operations management and business analytics major said.



Students gather outside of Maryland Hillel on Oct. 7, 2024, during a vigil honoring hostages taken by Hamas militants. (Giuseppe LoPiccolo/The Diamondback)

“We came together and created something beautiful out of destruction,” Steinhouse said.

Hoyer praised Jewish campus leaders during his address at Hillel. He also reiterated his support for Israel and criticized people who downplay the Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

In his speech, Hoyer commended university president Darryll Pines for his leadership during the past year, which the congressman told The Diamondback was “uniformly sensitive to each student, irrespective of their faith and their background.”

Pines announced in a Sept. 1 campuswide email that the university would restrict Monday’s “expressive events” on campus to university-sanctioned events.

Israel declared war on Hamas on Oct. 8, 2023, and began a military offensive that has killed more than 42,000 people in Gaza since, the Associated Press reported Tuesday.

At the time of Pines' email, this university's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter had reserved McKeldin Mall for a vigil planned for Monday to honor Palestinians killed in Gaza over the past year.

This university's restrictions meant it withdrew approvals for three events the Jewish Student Union was scheduled to host on Monday, The Diamondback previously reported.

In a lawsuit filed Sept. 17, this university's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter alleged the university's restrictions violated students' First Amendment rights.

Last week, a federal judge granted the chapter's request for a preliminary injunction, which temporarily paused the restrictions for on-campus "expressive events" on Monday.

Steinhaus told the crowd at Hillel's off-campus vigil she is frustrated that a day of mourning for many Jewish and Israeli community members has become a day for "manipulative political games."

"We couldn't just be ordinary students," Steinhaus said. "We had to transform ourselves into advocates, leaders and spokespeople for the Jewish community."

Israel in his speech at the vigil called the Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace event an "upside down debacle" and said fellow students excused violence against Israelis.

In a statement to The Diamondback on Tuesday, Students for Justice in Palestine said its vigil was a "success" as community members came together "in remembering the lives lost."

Hillel and Jewish student groups also organized events throughout the day to remember people killed on Oct. 7, 2023, and to call for the release of the remaining hostages held by Hamas.

The Terps for Israel student organization held a memorial to honor the hostages kidnapped by Hamas throughout Monday on Hornbake Plaza.

Metal barriers were placed along the area's perimeter. Event staff checked IDs, used metal detectors and searched attendees' bags before allowing students access to the memorial at Hornbake Plaza.

UMPD and university officials worked with student organizers to develop security plans for the event, according to a university statement to The Diamondback.

['It was heartbreaking': UMD students grieve hostages held by Hamas, killed in Gaza]

"In considering security needs, we take into account many factors, including the location of the event, specific activities planned, weather conditions and expected attendance," the statement said.

The Terps for Israel hostage memorial included metal chairs with the name of every hostage that Hamas kidnapped on Oct. 7, 2023, a Shabbat table for people who died in Hamas' attack and displays with the faces and names of Americans who Hamas took hostage.



A banner, demanding hostages taken by Hamas militants be let go, is displayed on Hornbake Plaza during a memorial honoring those hostages on Oct. 7, 2024. (Giuseppe LoPiccolo/The Diamondback)



Barricades surround Hornbake Plaza on Oct. 7, 2024, and contain a memorial honoring hostages taken by Hamas militants. (Giuseppe LoPiccolo/The Diamondback)



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The Associated Press reported on Monday that Hamas is still holding about 100 people hostage.

Organizers read the names of Oct. 7 victims for about two hours Monday afternoon outside the Hillel building.

Sara Weinstein said it was difficult to hold back tears while reading the names.

“It’s hard, it’s really, really hard to sit there and read these names,” Weinstein said. “These still are my brothers and sisters who I’m reading their names of ... I feel that connection to them.”

Weinstein’s brother was visiting Israel when Hamas attacked, the sophomore international relations major said. Weinstein’s brother or other family members in Israel could have been one of the victims, Weinstein said.

Senior plant science major Adena Hawk attended the vigil at Hillel and told The Diamondback her cousin, a medic, died earlier this year in Israel’s war in Gaza.

Hawk, who teared up at the vigil, said it has been difficult to continue with her life when her family and friends in Israel are struggling.

“When we have our low moments, the only way that we can rise up is together,” Hawk said.