**Summary of the report of the inter-ministerial committee to examine the treatment of sexual offenses victims during criminal proceedings**

According to the appointment letter, the role of the inter-ministerial committee is to assess the treatment of sexual offenses victims throughout the entire enforcement process, with an emphasis on the treatment given to the victims during criminal proceedings. The committee was asked to identify, characterize, and map the difficulties that sexual offenses victims experience with the different enforcement systems and during the judicial process, and to formulate practical solutions that provide appropriate responses to the victims’ needs and reflect the necessary sensitivities toward this population, including proposing amendments to legislation, making required adjustments in procedures, and the like.

Sexual offenses have been recognized in law, both in various legislative edicts and in court rulings, as a distinct form of offense, due to, among other reasons, the recognized and unique difficulties that sexual offenses victims experience during the criminal proceedings in their cases. Criminal proceedings dealing with sexual crimes have distinct characteristics, each one of which is liable to make it more difficult to overcome the crime without suffering even additional mental harm, all the more so because the legal elements exacerbate one another. Some aspects of the suffering victims endure can include harmful and long-term damage to the victim’s feeling of control over their life and body; an undermining of their faith in the freedom of choice that they have to operate as an autonomous person; and a broad erosion to their right to privacy and to having a truly protected personal space.

The committee was impressed that, in the last few years, there have been many developments, almost revolutionary, in the attitude of the entire legal enforcement system towards sexual offense victims in criminal proceedings. This change began taking place following the passage of the Law for the Rights of Crime Victims, 5769-2001 (hereinafter: “The Law for the Rights of Crime Victims”), in 2001, that incorporated professional expertise from the field of therapy into criminal discourse.

Despite these developments, many sexual offenses victims and their families experience substantial emotional difficulties throughout every stage of the criminal proceedings, from the moment they make the complaint to the police, or when the crime is revealed in some other way, to the examination of the claim and the conduct of the judicial proceedings in court. This recalls the protest movement MeToo and the “Why I didn’t complain” movement, which followed soon after, which revealed, among other things, the reasons why few victims of sexual crimes make a complaint to the police. During the protests, victims of sexual violence explained that they avoided speaking out or making a complaint because of the shame, the self-blame, the fear that they wouldn’t be believed, unequal power relations, the severe mental anguish that is involved in dealing with the criminal proceedings, and even because of the difficulties in facing the enforcement authorities and the courts. In addition, the criminal process is long and tiring for sexual offenses victims, and causes victims to experience a loss of control over and knowledge about their case.

In the course of its work, the committee was asked to make changes and adjustments to the existing procedures and to the conduct of enforcement bodies and courts, in order to usher in an improvement in the status of sexual offenses victims during criminal proceedings. This background, with an emphasis on the unique characteristics of sex crime, as will be detailed in part four of the report, is what makes the criminal proceedings more difficult for sexual offenses victims than other criminal victims.