



## The Dangers of Restricting the Phrase “From the River to the Sea” on Meta’s Platforms

May 21, 2024

Fight for the Future is a national digital rights nonprofit with over 3 million members. In recent years, we’ve engaged our supporters in campaigns calling for a [ban on facial recognition](#) technology and other biometric surveillance technologies, for data privacy and [end-to-end encryption protections](#) on social media platforms, and for policies that [confront](#) the [censorship](#) of marginalized groups online.

**We are writing to express opposition to heavy-handed moderation and censorship of the phrase “from the river to the sea” on Meta’s platforms.**

As Palestinian movement leaders and community members have explained [again](#) and [again](#), this phrase often represents a call for freedom and equality for Palestinians and all peoples living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The phrase itself is a form of political discourse, and even if someone were to take issue with it, it is speech that must be protected.

Broad attempts to moderate phrases like “from the river to the sea” inevitably end up wrongfully silencing hundreds of thousands of users. The Oversight Board is well aware of Meta’s [other attempts](#) to restrict certain terms and phrases that ultimately resulted in sweeping censorship. The stakes of that censorship could not be higher right now, as we witness one of the largest mass mobilizations and protest movements in recent history. Undercutting critical political discourse in this moment could have immeasurable consequences for social justice actions on the ground.

In addition to the inevitable censorship, we know Meta’s attempts to restrict “from the river to the sea” will disproportionately target and censor content from Palestinian and Arabic accounts, while simultaneously allowing posts in Hebrew to stand, even as they explicitly [call for genocide](#) of Palestinians and [Israeli control](#) of the entire territory “from the river to the sea.”

That’s because Meta has consistently demonstrated a pattern of applying double standards and of hypocrisy when it comes to the moderation of content related to Palestine/Israel. For example, [according to 7amleh](#), hashtags like [#למחוקאתעזה](#) (Erase Gaza) have been allowed to proliferate on Instagram, despite the fact that they present a blatant incitement to violence. In contrast, Meta immediately censored the Arabic hashtag [#الأقصى\\_طوفان](#) in the days after October 7. Unsurprisingly, Meta never censored the parallel hashtag used to glorify Israel’s assault on Gaza in Hebrew [#ברזל\\_חרבות](#).



We cannot ignore the broader context in which the Oversight Board's call for comments is occurring. Organized campaigns to ban the use of the phrase "from the river to the sea" in protests in the [US](#), [UK](#), and [Germany](#) are fundamentally linked to attempts to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. We see this mirrored at Meta, as highlighted by the [Meta: We Need to Talk about Genocide](#) petition and this [statement signed by 73 civil society organisations](#), demanding that Meta refrain from censoring criticism of Zionism on its platforms. Fight for the Future strongly supports these and any other efforts aimed at challenging this dangerous conflation within Meta's policies.

We applaud the Oversight Board's recent nuanced approach to moderating the [Arabic term "shaheed"](#) and we encourage a similar approach to the phrase "from the river to the sea." OSB's mitigation of discriminatory Meta policies is most urgent for the millions of Palestinians whose lives are currently on the line, but it's also urgent for employees within the company itself, who recently released [a scathing statement](#) on bias, censorship, and lack of support for the Palestinian community inside Meta. These workers note in their statement that along with the privilege of working on tech products that serve the world comes tremendous responsibility. The Oversight Board has frequently offered a beacon of hope in the fight to hold Meta accountable for harmful moderation practices, and we hope this instance will be no different. We welcome further engagement on this topic at any time.