

Subject: On the misguided and racist banning of “from the river to the sea” slogans on Meta
From: American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)

With over 35,000 Palestinians killed by Israel in the past 7 months, a ban on Palestinian freedom slogans like “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” is akin to complicity in their deaths, erasure, and silencing. As a representative grassroots organization of over a million Palestinian Americans and Muslim Americans for Palestine across the country, we call on Meta to protect freedom of speech for our marginalized communities: do not ban slogans like “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Attempts to distort or ban the moral calls of victims of injustice, or to contribute to the delegitimization of defenders of freedom and equality for all, is to be partners in oppression. To restrict freedom of speech on speech about freedom is not only ironic; it is one of the most cynical evolutions of social media censoring one could imagine. It is unconscionable—and likely unconstitutional.

Ultimately, the move to ban this slogan is misguided and misinformed, as we describe below; and it will have a disproportionate impact on Palestinians, Muslims, Jewish pro-peace voices, and other advocates for lasting peace in the land of historic Palestine—a peace based in freedom for all from the river to the sea. By extension, the move serves to bolster or erase brutal crimes against the Palestinian people and other oppressed peoples. We call on Meta not to be complicit in distorting the morality of Palestinian rights and the principles of justice that are foundational to the Palestinian freedom movement.

First, a few points on the claims against the slogan and what it actually means. The slogan is what it says: a slogan for freedom. Efforts to say otherwise are politically expedient and projections of other oppressive ideologies.

1. A freedom slogan can only be understood as otherwise (its opposite) if one group’s freedom is defined as zero-sum with another group’s freedom. When pro-Israel groups claim that this freedom slogan is a call for violence, they define safety in the way that they themselves actualize it: at the expense of others. The Palestinian freedom struggle does not share that exclusive notion of freedom from the river to the sea.
 - a. This idea that it is the pro-Israel way to think of the slogan is not an editorial take: it is based on the actual way in which Israel has used the slogan itself. Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu has [said](#) that “between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.” This echoes the [Nation State](#) law that Israeli leaders overwhelmingly passed in 2018, which says that self-determination is a right unique to the Jewish people in “all parts of the Land of Israel,” including what Zionists call “Judea and Samaria”—the Palestinian Occupied West Bank. That principle of apartheid policy and official discrimination is a “[guiding principle](#)” of the [right-wing](#) Likud Party which has dominated Israeli politics since 1977. Needless to say, that understanding of singular self-determination for Jewish people has been the basis for Israel’s impunity regarding its illegal occupation, settlements, imprisonment of Palestinians without charge, murder of Palestinians across the West Bank, and similarly its ongoing warfare of annihilation in Gaza.

Palestinians use the expression from the river to the sea to reclaim what freedom actually means: freedom from oppression, not freedom to oppress.

2. Jewish people, including Israeli human rights [groups](#), [also use](#) the phrase to call for freedom and equality across historic Palestine, an end to the illegal occupation of Palestinian land, an end to apartheid, an end to the occupation and siege of Gaza, and to call upon advocates to trust that the arch of history is on the side of justice: that Palestine will be free.
3. Critique of this slogan has only emerged after October 7th, showing a disingenuous effort to claim the phrase as problematic when sympathy for Palestinians was on the rise due to the Israeli military's disproportionate warfare that, within three weeks, had killed over 3,000 Palestinians. In the face of their annihilation, Palestinians have called for freedom everywhere, not just in Gaza. In particular, groups like the Anti-Defamation League, which has championed this silencing effort, [changed](#) its website description of the phrase on October 26th, 2023. The site previously indicated the chant was simply "a slogan commonly featured in pro-Palestine campaigns and chanted at demonstrations," while also saying it may make pro-Israel Jewish people feel ostracized. It does not say what the page was updated later to say, which is the claim of anti-semitism inherent to the phrase. Moreover, the ADL has [been called out](#) by dozens of major progressive, anti-racist organizations for its anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian racism as well as complicity in right-wing, oppressive tactics and attacks on freedom of inquiry towards human rights. It is not a reliable source on this topic.
4. The phrase is widely [used](#) as a call for liberation from all forms of oppression and as a call for equality for all. That is how it is used among our base across the country, and by Palestine advocates all over the world. As the Washington Post has [reported](#) and [historians](#) have noted, the slogan "gained traction as a call for a 'secular, democratic, free Palestine.'"

Second, the impacts of banning this slogan will certainly fall disparately on Palestinian and pro-Palestinian freedom of speech—amounting to racism. This sets Meta up for a lawsuit, even if they have users signing onto terms of service. Some examples of how this will impact Palestinians, because such bans have already had an impact:

1. Human Rights watch [documented](#) over 1,000 takedowns of Palestinian content on Meta, in part with the partial implementation of "from the river to the sea" as an official censored phrase since October.
2. A member of British Parliament [removed](#) MP Andy McDonald from office for saying, "We will not rest until we have justice. Until all people, Israelis and Palestinians, between the river and the sea, can live in peaceful liberty." Even the most explicit expression of this slogan to "live in peaceful liberty" was unprecedentedly censored because of this media campaign to suggest the phrase can only mean something offensive.

Third, it is telling that such a move is unprecedented—a new debate surrounding a [long-time](#) freedom slogan. The timing suggests that were there not a "[plausible](#)" genocide ongoing by Israel, which legal scholars [agree](#) is in fact a [certain](#) genocide against the Palestinian people, and were there not a [powerful lobby](#) to construct such a debate which

serves their interests in Israeli impunity, this would not be under consideration. That fact suggests the banning of the phrase is a measure to distract from and obscure the visibility of the ongoing genocide.

Finally, it is important for Meta to consider very carefully what it means to accept the IHRA definition of anti-semitism, which is often the basis for claims that critique of Israel is inherently anti-Jewish—a claim that [silences](#) Palestinians who have no choice in who is oppressing them. The use of the “International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance” or [IHRA definition](#) of anti-Semitism obscures widely documented human issues of the State of Israel on the basis of its self-definition as a Jewish state. The IHRA definition has [been rejected](#) by [multiple](#) pro-peace Jewish organizations, [public figures](#), Jewish pro-Israel group [J-Street](#), and even reformist Jews (the majority denomination of religious Jews in the US) who have [pushed](#) for the definition to not become codified in US law.

Moving to ban the slogan would put Meta on the wrong side of history – on the side of silencing freedom struggles in favor of the powerful institutional forces of oppression and war. In a war like this one, in which over 15,000 children have been killed while the U.S. and other governments supply unending and unrestricted weapons, acting to protect the affectations of unsafety that those who support disproportionate warfare claim is acting not only foolishly but in total bias and inhumanity toward all victims of the war. Meta need not adjudicate on the slogan of freedom for people from anywhere to anywhere. Freedom is not a zero-sum and as such, no one can be claiming safety only at the expense and silencing of others.

Also please note that public figures that are moved to appease this new claim against the slogan, including public officials passing resolutions against it, are not evidence of that censorship being correct. Certainly there are many historic examples of censorship syndicated across government leaders before later corrected for its racism. The self-referential syndication of campaigns—at every level—to adopt a censoring definition of this slogan *is an effort to mask just how new this interpretation is*, and why it is being weaponized now to stop the critique of Israel’s [“plausible”](#) genocide.

Thank you for the consideration. We hope Meta will do the right thing.

American Muslims for Palestine (501c3 organization)

Some additional sources and reading regarding “from the river to the sea” freedom slogans:

- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/from-the-river-to-the-sea-what-does-the-palestinian-slogan-really-mean>
- <https://daoudkuttub.medium.com/from-the-river-to-the-sea-explained-3a79ed19917e>
- <https://jewishcurrents.org/what-does-from-the-river-to-the-sea-really-mean>
- <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/23972967/river-to-sea-palestine-israel-hamas>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/31/from-the-river-to-the-sea-where-does-the-slogan-come-from-and-what-does-it-mean-israel-palestine>

- <https://theconversation.com/from-the-river-to-the-sea-a-palestinian-historian-explores-the-meaning-and-intent-of-scrutinized-slogan-217491>
- <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/11/on-the-history-meaning-and-power-of-from-the-river-to-the-sea/>