



Meta Oversight Board – Public Comment

Posts that include “From the River to the Sea”

Since its founding in Geneva, Switzerland in 1936, the World Jewish Congress has acted as the diplomatic arm of the Jewish people. The World Jewish Congress is the leading international organization connecting and protecting Jewish communities globally, in more than 100 countries. The WJC’s overriding goal is to protect Jewish communities across the globe and to allow Jews everywhere to live freely as Jews, without discrimination or the threat of persecution.

As advocates for Jewish security around the world, WJC strongly condemns the use of the phrase—“From the river to the sea”—and we call on the oversight board to take a clear stance and require its removal in *all* circumstances. The phrase originates from terrorist propaganda and is a call for the annihilation, by armed resistance and terrorism, of the Jewish state of Israel. It has become popular amongst users following the Hamas brutal attack of October 7th 2023 on Israel, killing over 1200 people, injuring hundreds, destroying communities and taking hostage over 240 people into Gaza. This further connects the phrase to use of terrorism and violence, supporting and glorifying terrorist acts and an organization that the United States and many other states around the world have declared a terrorist organization, and Meta has designated as a dangerous organization under its policies and in accordance with the laws of the United States.

Antisemitism is on the rise again all over the world, and coupled with the frighteningly fast-growing threat of global terrorism, our Jewish communities face enormous danger and pressure. Antisemitism, the world’s oldest hatred, still affects society and has been rising at an alarming rate.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) [working definition of antisemitism](#), a definition constructed by a multilateral process of countries, adopted by many states and organizations, and routinely used to explain how antisemitism is manifested in current society, states Antisemitism includes terms and phrases that deny the Jewish people “their right to self-determination.” To date, the IHRA working definition has been adopted by forty-two countries, including those which maintain a robust and open market-place of ideas.

The WJC submits that “from the river to the sea” is inherently antisemitic hate speech and that its continued, pervasive online usage will inevitably result in intensified violence against Jewish communities around the globe. It persists as a call for violence against Jews and serves to glorify terrorist acts and organizations.

Furthermore, any use of the phrase goes against the [WJC policy](#) of support for a negotiated solution whereby two states live side-by-side in security and prosperity.

In addition, our public comment will demonstrate that that the banning of the phrase adheres with official Meta policy and would not impede Meta in fulfilling its commitment to freedom of speech principles.

Origins and Use of the Phrase

“From the river to the sea” has long been used as a call for Israel’s erasure – or, worse still, the genocide of its Jewish population. Early appearance of the phrase can be found in the revolutionary doctrine of the

Palestinian national movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The Palestine Liberation Organization's founding charter, published in 1964, delineated the organization's primary objective: Israel's destruction and the establishment of a Palestinian state that was maximalist in territory, encompassing all land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

The [1964 charter of the PLO's Palestinian National Council](#) called for the "recovery of the usurped homeland in its entirety." It stated that "Jews who are of Palestinian origin shall be considered Palestinians if they are willing to live peacefully and loyally in Palestine," specifically defining 'Palestinian' as those who had "normally resided in Palestine until 1947." The PLO later revised the charter to confer residency rights only to Israelis who descend from Jews who lived in the area before the first Aliyah in 1882. The revision effectively rendered the PLO charter a call for the ethnic cleansing of the vast majority of Jews living in Israel.

The term grew in prominence during and after the first Palestinian violent uprising, intifada, in 1987, which featured serial violent attacks against Israeli civilian and military targets. Since this point, Palestinian nationalists of various political stripes—and many of their supporters around the world—have parroted the phrase as a specific call for a Palestinian state in place of present-day Israel. Hamas—a terrorist Islamist organization which calls for Israel's destruction and the genocide of its population as its *raison d'état*—cemented the phrase in its [2017 charter](#). Leaders of other terrorist organizations or extremist regimes such as Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Iranian leaders have also invoked the phrase in the crudest way possible to signal a fight to eradicate Jews, which they are willing to wage until the "[end of days](#)".

While some may claim that not all current users of the phrase share the ideology or objectives of groups such as Hamas, the call for Palestinian freedom from the "river to the sea"—even in its most benign form—is still antisemitic for it refutes the Jewish people's right to self-determination and is a call for violence against the Jewish population in Israel and around the world. As such, the WJC requests that the oversight board rule that it violates the community standards of Meta and recommend removal of the phrase on all its platforms.

Online Trends

Despite its insidious implications, the phrase has been used widely across social media, including on Meta. Its increased usage takes place against the backdrop of a dramatic increase in other antisemitic content and posts on a wide range of social media platforms, as well as a perturbing spike in physical attacks against Jewish individuals and institutions. The increase in antisemitic hate-crimes globally is directly linked to the spread of antisemitic and extreme anti-Zionist propaganda online, which groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah have exploited to advance their own political ends. Calls for a free Palestine "from the river to the sea" have been accompanied by a marked increase in antisemitic harassment and incitement online. In October 2023, the World Jewish Congress [released a report](#) exposing Hamas's use of the internet and social media platforms to encourage a surge of antisemitic hate speech on online platforms since the Oct. 7 attacks. The report highlighted deficiencies in platforms' content moderation and moderating strategies. It found that Hamas and affiliated groups have exploited the platform dynamics of major social media companies, hijacking the feedback loop between real-world events and online discourse. These groups have quickly gained support from a wide range of ideological allies online who began using discussions about the conflict to promote antisemitic narratives and calls to violence.

Furthermore, antisemitic content is often underscored by violent language. According to digital investigations by Memetica and the World Jewish Congress, the hashtags #DeathtotheJews and

#DeathtoJews appeared over 51,000 times in the one month following the Hamas attack, an over 800% increase as compared to the previous month.

In a [recently published yearly publication](#) of online antisemitism in Latin America by the Latin American Jewish Congress (LAJC) supported by the WJC, most of the comments compiled on Facebook related to Israel were negative. The LAJC found that an additional 9.70% of comments were antisemitic hate speech. Among the discourses used by antisemitic users, accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide by the Jewish people stand out, such as: "(...) murderers of innocent children the people of Satan" and "... refers to the persecution of a people and the intentional plan, as well as creating the means for their extermination, which Hitler did. Netanyahu's government does the same." A significant amount of content equates the atrocities of the Holocaust with the current situation in Palestine.

Offline Trends and Harms

The continued use and spread of this term has the effect of intimidating Jewish users on Meta and of galvanizing antisemitic actors to commit violence against Jewish individuals and institutions. Antisemitic attacks have risen at alarming rates in the past decade, and especially since the October 7 attacks against Israel. The recent increase in antisemitic incidents is global, and Jewish communities are increasingly vulnerable to attacks at the hands of antisemitic agitators.

Irrespective of their intent, those who chant “from the river to the sea” are using a phrase that is inextricably associated with anti-Jewish violence and terror organizations such as Hamas. It has already been linked to violence in America — signs declaring “from the river to the sea” were present at the exact Los Angeles location where 69 year-old [Paul Kessler lost his life](#) at the hands of an anti-Israel protester, amongst other sites where Jewish Americans have been subjected to physical violence. Indeed, the number of FBI investigations into anti-Jewish hate crimes tripled in the three months after Oct. 7, [according to FBI Director Christopher Wray](#).

In countries ranging from Europe to South America, Jewish communities are increasingly vulnerable to attacks at the hands of antisemitic agitators. In England, there has been a 589% increase in the number of antisemitic incidents since the Oct. 7 attacks on southern Israel, [according to the Community Security Trust \(CST\)](#), which monitors anti-Jewish abuse and attacks and provides security for UK Jewish communities. CST recorded 4103 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2023, the highest total in a calendar year reported to the organization. Two-thirds of the 2023 incidents occurred after the Hamas massacre.

A host of Latin American countries have also witnessed dramatic increases in antisemitic hate-crimes. Despite its history of inclusion and tolerance, Chile’s Jewish community have faced considerable threats. Furthermore, the Argentinian Jewish community—which remains the largest of any in South America—has bore the brunt of increased hostility since the onset of the Israel-Hamas war, [with many Jewish schools even urging their students not to wear their usual uniforms for fear of assault](#). The data relating to recent spikes in antisemitism provide reason to fear for the safety and future of Jewish communities in countries around the world. In addition, while it is difficult to determine the exact dogma and misinformation that leads individual bad actors to commit hate-crimes, WJC submits that the recent increase in attacks is directly linked to the spread of antisemitic and extreme anti-Zionist sentiment on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram – which includes, but is certainly not limited to, calls for a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea.”

Meta’s Human Rights Responsibilities

As an [adherent](#) to the provisions of the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), Meta has an obligation to protect human rights, which [includes](#) the right to free expression.

The World Jewish Congress is committed to free speech and open expression principles. The health of any democracy is contingent on a free marketplace of ideas, which requires the exchange of information over emotionally fraught issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the permitting of speech that many deem disagreeable.

At the same time, however, no right is absolute. Because of its commitment to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Meta has a duty to restrict certain forms of speech that adversely affect the realization of other rights contained in the International Bill of Human Rights, [such as the right to freedom and security](#). Addressing hate speech does not mean restricting mere criticism of certain government policies. It means keeping speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, which is prohibited under international law. Article 20, paragraph 2 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) states “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”

Speech that demands a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea” falls under this category, however narrowly defined. It constitutes an *exceptional* form of speech insofar as it is both inherently antisemitic and likely to produce violence against Jewish individuals and institutions. In accordance with its commitment to the human rights contained in a vast body of international law, WJC requests that the oversight board err on the side of safety as opposed to continued incitement and hate.

Free-Speech Concerns

Meta has a responsibility to strike a balance between maintaining a robust public square and not allowing for the spread of hate-speech that endangers users of its platforms and society at large. Advocacy for the Palestinian national cause is not antisemitic – and nor is criticism of the Israeli government. The problem, however, is that Israel’s critics too often cross a line by calling for the country’s destruction and inciting violence against Israelis and Jews living throughout the diaspora. Like many other forms of hate, antisemitism has mutated and is often expressed under the guise of anti-Israel sentiment. Furthermore, while it may seem difficult to distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israeli government policy and insidious bigotry, the IHRA working definition provides a viable framework to do so. According to the [IHRA definition](#), “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic,” but calling for Israel’s destruction, and denying the Jewish people’s right to self-determine, is.

It is possible that some who today use the phrase are indicating a desire for Palestinian liberation that is not inherently a call for the annihilation of the Jewish people and State of Israel. However such intent is extremely difficult to understand from posts on Meta platforms. Moreover, while the intent of the specific user may carry some legitimacy, the use of the phrase serves to further escalate the extremist views of those who use it with genocidal intent and support the actions and violent terrorism of Hamas and other terrorist organizations.

Meta Policies on Violence and Incitement

Under Meta’s policies [prohibiting Violence and Incitement](#), Meta removes language that incites violence. This includes statements representing “intention, aspiration, or calls for violence against a target, and threats can

be expressed in various types of statements such as statements of intent, calls for action, advocacy, aspirational statements and conditional statements. "The phrase therefore does not need to be only a clear call for violence, and as such "from the river to the sea" can be an aspirational statement, an advocacy statement, and even a call for violence under this policy.

The policy also takes into account the public visibility and vulnerability of the target of the threats. With the current rise of antisemitism, Jewish communities should clearly be considered a more vulnerable group that needs special protection from violence at this point in time.

Meta Policies on Hate Speech

Meta [prohibits hate speech](#), defined as dehumanizing speech; statements of inferiority, expressions of contempt or disgust; cursing; and calls for exclusion or segregation. This includes statements in the form of calls for action or statements of intent to inflict, aspirational or conditional statements about, or statements advocating or supporting harm in calls for death without a perpetrator or method.

As mentioned above, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, a definition constructed by a multilateral process of countries, adopted by many states and organizations, and routinely used to explain how antisemitism manifests in current society, [states](#) that Antisemitism includes terms and phrases that deny the Jewish people "their right to self-determination." It further includes criticism leveled at Israel beyond criticism that is directed at other countries.

Like other unique characteristics of antisemitism, the connection of the Jewish people to the Jewish homeland in its current-day form as the State of Israel, differs starkly from the notions of patriotism and statehood that are commonly found worldwide today. It is this connection that makes the phrase inherently directed against the idea of the Jewish homeland in totality, which in turn makes this speech hateful against the Jewish people.

Meta Policies on Designated Organizations and Individuals

Meta removes Glorification, Support, and Representation of [violent organizations designated as such](#) (Tier 1) by Meta. Glorification of such organizations is also prohibited on the platforms. The phrase "from the river to the sea", with its origins and adoption by organizations falling under Tier 1 according to Meta's own designation, serves as a glorification of Hamas's, and other terrorist organizations', genocidal intent to erase the Jewish state of Israel and Jews around the world, as they clearly stated in their founding documents. It is therefore a violation of the DOI policy.

Conclusion

It is in light of the risks of violence and the hateful underpinning of the term "From the River to the Sea", that we urge the Oversight Board to take concrete action against the use of the term on Meta's platform.