



While we intend to explain in good faith the origins of the slogan, its uses, and the misconceptions surrounding it, all the while answering the Board’s questions, we are deeply concerned by the choice of a case that has been written about, studied, and discussed intensively over the years. We worry about investing significant time and resources into efforts of debunking and demystifying at such a critical historical moment that warrants no deviations into distractions.

Considering the severity of the crisis in Palestine today, where Palestinians are being killed by the hour in Gaza, we find it disconcerting to engage in defensive positions and justifications concerning benign and harmless language.

We would also like to add that, regarding the Board’s request for submissions on research into online trends in content using the phrase, we remind the Board that Meta has extensive capacity, networks, resources, and tools that would suffice to illuminate any contentions about the use of the slogan in question. We would have respected and appreciated efforts demonstrating that both the Board and Meta had conducted transparent and informed research on the subject and shared it either publicly or with relevant members of civil society.

“From the River to the Sea:” Origins and Uses

Nothing in the slogan “from the river to the sea” inherently constitutes a call to violence or the exclusion of any particular group, nor is it linked exclusively to a statement expressing support for Hamas. It is important to recognize the dangers of reading into hidden meanings and intentions behind political statements that do not expressly contain inciting language. Instead, the Board is invited to conduct sufficient research into what Palestinian, Israeli, and many other scholars have articulated and documented about the [phrase](#), which exposes and discredits accusations claiming otherwise. We will briefly touch upon some of the intended and perceived meanings and uses of the phrase by a variety of groups, from the Palestinian diaspora to civil society to Hamas.

1) A Historic Call for Unity and Justice

Firstly, the slogan “from the river to the sea”—which predates the existence of Hamas—must be considered within the larger context of the phrase “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Scholars, historians, and journalists have written extensively about the history of the phrase and what it means, debunking false claims and clarifying misconceptions about any genocidal intentions behind its use. Its popularity and resonance across the globe stems from this short phrase’s capacity to encompass Palestinians belonging to the land and its rivers and seas. This slogan is [not a political program](#) used to defend a one-state solution or a two-state solution. It is a call for unity, freedom, and the end of borders, checkpoints, siege, and separation walls that have fragmented Palestinian lands and segregated its inhabitants.

Its first iterations in Arabic were protest calls against the UN Partition Plan of 1947 under Resolution 181 which divided Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, with the latter acquiring a larger portion of the land



(56%). The plan proposed establishing a Jewish state on over half of Mandate Palestine, despite Jews making up less than a third of the population and owning under seven per cent of the land at that time. Seeing the blatant unfairness of this decision, Palestinians felt cheated by the international community and considered the partition, which paved the path to the 1948 Nakba one year later, an act of theft that dispossessed them from their villages, towns, and cities. As scholar Maha Nasser has noted in her discussion of the meaning of the phrase, recent attacks on its use “are part of a larger legacy of delegitimizing [Palestinian] national claims, erasing and denying connections to their land,” where “elimination of the natives is accompanied by racist depictions of native populations as being transient and barbaric.” The purposeful misreading of the phrase as incitement “to end all Jews from the river to the sea” shamelessly conjures Islamophobic and anti-Arab sentiments that impose unfounded “violent” and “barbaric” intentions on Arab and Palestinian aspirations for freedom. Why should a call for an end to segregation, oppression, expulsion—and today, genocide—have to be falsely “interpreted” as a call to violence?

Scholars agree that the phrase began gaining traction in the 1960s as a call for a “secular, democratic, and free Palestine” during the phase of further segregation and occupation in 1967. It became even more popular [among Palestinian activists and intellectuals](#) in the diaspora in the 1990s following the Oslo Accords. The slogan does not conjure, as Nasser reminds us, “a specific political platform,” but is instead a call for an “imagined future of peace and freedom.” Israel is constantly [restricting and invading](#) internationally recognized Palestinian territories, as [documented](#) by international and Israeli scholars and human rights organizations. In 2021, Human Rights Watch reported that the Israeli government’s treatment of Palestinians amounts to [apartheid](#) due to systematic oppression and inhumane acts. In 2022, Amnesty International echoed this, stating that Israel imposes a [system of oppression](#) and domination against Palestinians, constituting apartheid under international law. That same year, Michael Lynk, then UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, [said](#) Israel’s discriminatory legal and political system favors Israeli Jewish settlers over Palestinians.

This is the important context under which the phrase “From the river to the sea” is uttered. The slogan demands an end to the apartheid regime, not the expulsion of Jews from Palestine. As Dr. Nasser succinctly explains: It’s a call for a principle of freedom, equality, and anti-racism.

Arabs and Jews should be able to live together with equal rights, no oppressor and no oppressed, across the geographic region of occupied Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. By criminalizing the phrase and its use in such a context, criticism against [atrocities committed by Israel, including ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza](#), would mean abandoning accountability for a technologically advanced, internationally-backed, and at this point, vengeful and retaliatory aggressor.

2) A Call for An End to Illegal Apartheid, Not Jewishness

Israel’s discriminatory practices emphasize its foundations as an [ethno-religious state](#). Calling for freedom “from the river to the sea” is not a call for genocide, nor calls for an antisemitic objective, rather, it is a demand for a democratic state wherein all people can exist despite religion, race, color, ethnicity, creed, etc.



In order for such a use to be antisemitic or violent, Israel must be the only country where the Jewish community lives, and secondly, the slogan must be used against the Jewish population, not the Israeli state. Even in its policies, Meta defines hate speech as [“as direct attacks against people — rather than concepts or institutions.”](#) In most geopolitical discourses, speaking against the existence of the state is a political stand rather than hate speech, as states do not represent a race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability. As such, the use of the slogan in the sense of the “establishment of a state of Palestine instead of the state of Israel” is not, by itself, hate speech, as long as the slogan is not accompanied by the removal of the Jewish people from the territory as well.

3) Using the Slogan Against “Zionism” or “Zionists”

While Zionism has a long history as well, the first Zionist Congress convened in 1897 at Basel, Switzerland. It is important to reiterate that [Zionism is an ideology](#), the ideology that the current geographical area where the state of Israel is established is “promised” and constitutes “natural” territories exclusively belonging to the Jewish people. While there are several branches of the ideology, some of these branches, especially revisionist Zionists, are calling for armed action [even outside the boundaries of the current State of Israel](#). In fact, it is also argued, by Zionists such as Benny Morris, that Zionism meant [“a major displacement of the Arab population if a Jewish state was to arise or safely endure.”](#) As such, the use of the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” can only be considered as a slogan that is against Zionism. It is also important to remember that Zionism does not represent Judaism, nor the Jewish people, just as radical Islam does not represent all Muslims nor Arabs. As such, Zionism should not be a protected category since it is a political ideology. It is our position that political ideologies should not be protected from criticism, and this must be reflected in Meta’s content moderation decisions, lest we treat other political ideologies in the same way.

4) The Use of the Slogan by Hamas

The fact that the slogan has been used by Hamas does not necessarily qualify it as hate speech against Jews. “From the river to the sea” has also been used by ill-intentioned actors—such as the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—without being criminalized. The phrase is also included in the founding charter of Netanyahu’s Likud party stating: “Between the sea and the Jordan (river) there will only be Israeli sovereignty.”

An exact comparison can be made about the Arabic phrase “Allah-u Akbar” (God is great), which is uttered and revered by all Muslims around the world. Some terrorists shout this term before committing violent attacks—condemned by millions of Muslims. By the same logic, should it then be considered “dangerous” as well?

The Dangers of Feeding a False Narrative

Those speaking up against the Israeli occupation's war crimes in Palestine have been and continue to face persecutions worldwide, and in many cases, they have faced dangerous repercussions for using the phrase



“From the river to the sea.” This has often led to the denial of their right to freedom of speech and thwarting global solidarity efforts, especially under genocide. Here are some examples.

- **Austria:** [Banning a Palestine demonstration](#) because the slogan was included in the invitations, associating the slogan with PLO.
- **France:** Banning [Collectif Palestine Vainera](#), a member organization of Samidoun.
- **Germany:** [Palestinian activists are facing persecution in workplaces, immigration courts, and communities.](#)
- **UK:** [Andy McDonald, a Labour MP was suspended](#) for stating: “We won’t rest until we have justice, until all people, Israelis and Palestinians, between the river and the sea can live in peaceful liberty.”
[A woman was arrested](#) for using the slogan, to be then released on the condition of not entering the Manchester city center in the UK.
- **US:** African-American political commentator [Marc Lamont Hill was fired by CNN](#) for using the slogan during a UN event for the International Day of solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- Representative Rashida Tlaib, Democrat of Michigan, [was censured by House lawmakers](#) after she used the slogan “from the river to the sea,” despite condemning Hamas’s acts on October 7.

Meta’s submission of this case to the Oversight Board for review further consolidates false accusations that the slogan could be dangerous, consequently offering further justifications for the persecution of people rightfully condemning atrocities committed by Israel and demanding justice for Palestinians.

Legal Decisions on the Slogan

Two courts in Germany have declared that several pro-Palestinian slogans, including “From the river to the sea,” [are not illegal](#). The [Court of Cologne](#) and Münster have both decided that criticism of the Israeli state is "protected by freedom of expression," emphasizing that the slogans are "directed against Israel and not against the Jewish population of Germany." Back in August 2023, the Dutch Court of Appeal also concluded the same [decision](#), noting that “There is no threat, incitement or criminal incitement to hatred” associated with the use of the slogan.

Meta’s Systematic Bias in Moderating Arabic and Hebrew

Following the October 7 attacks, Meta published an update on its efforts related to content moderation in relation to the ongoing conflict. In this update, Meta stated that they established “a special operations center staffed with experts, including fluent Hebrew and Arabic speakers, to closely monitor and respond to this rapidly evolving situation in real-time.”

While the promise of this initiative is commendable, we have noticed that since October 2023, the operations center has not been as effective as promised. We observed that the real reason for its ineffectiveness is a result of faulty policies guiding its actions, rather than the ineptitude of the special operations center. In fact, following the October 7 attacks and Israel’s nonstop bombardment and invasion of Gaza, numerous civil society organizations have registered [bias in content moderation and](#)



[discrimination against Palestinian content](#). This discrimination went beyond content moderation policies, extending to such erroneous errors as adding the term [“terrorist” to the biographies of Palestinian Instagram users](#)—allegedly “by accident.”

It is shocking that despite the Business and Human Rights report issued one year ago, [which is still not fully implemented](#), and despite Meta’s [claim](#) to having established a Hebrew classifier, [the latter is still reported to not be put in use](#).

Moreover, the Wall Street Journal has reported that [Meta manipulated its content filters](#) to apply stricter standards to content generated in the Middle East and specifically Palestine by lowering the threshold for its algorithms to moderate content violating Community Guidelines from 80% to 40% for content from the Middle East and to just 25% for content from Palestine, in an aggressive content moderation policy. Without a Hebrew classifier, such an aggressive approach would only weigh on Arabic content, creating clear discrimination.

We ask Meta the following questions:

How effective can a special operations center be without the necessary tools to moderate content? Is it realistic to expect an equal and non-discriminatory treatment of Arabic and Hebrew content without the use of a Hebrew classifier?

On another note, we welcome the [Oversight Board’s report](#) on Meta’s [cross-check system](#) and its shortcomings, especially the points where the OSB asks for more transparency around how cross-check works and notes the delayed removal of violating content. On that aspect, we would like to ask the Board if there are any statistics related to delays in the removal of Hebrew content in comparison with the Arabic content.

Meta’s discriminatory approach to different political discourses

We would like to highlight cases where both Meta and the OSB demonstrated tolerance towards posts that were more prone to be considered hate speech or incitement to violence. We state that we do not express any judgment in the tolerance shown in these cases, but we only aim to establish a comparison and demonstrate the discriminatory approach to Palestinian cases.

1) Slogan in Iranian Protests

This is the [case](#) where the Iranian protesters against the regime were using the slogan “Marg bar Khamenei” where the sentence means both “death to Khamenei” and “down with Khamenei.” In this case, the Board was able to see the political sense behind a sentence that can also have a violent meaning. In comparison, the slogan “From the river to the sea,” a phrase without violent language, should not even be looked into as a case.



2) Myanmar Post about the Muslim Community

[In this decision](#), the board found that removing content that says “there is something psychologically wrong with Muslims” is not hate speech, because the content taken as a whole does not aim to be condescending against the Muslim community, but rather constitutes a protest regarding the inaction of some Muslims to different events around the world. While we agree with the decision of the OSB, we would like to ask why a slogan such as “From the river to the sea,” that does not even refer to the Jewish community or Judaism, is referred to as a case worthy of OSB investigation.

3) Tolerance for Violent Calls against Russian Soldiers

In 2022, following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Meta has shown a [temporary tolerance](#) to violent posts targeting Russian soldiers and officials. We would like to ask why such tolerance is not shown to the Palestinians, and those living in Gaza, following [forced starvation](#), [indiscriminate targeting](#), and an ongoing [genocide case at the ICJ against the state of Israel](#).

4) Hate Speech in Hebrew against Palestinians

We were not able to find any cases referred to the OSB by Meta in this category.

While we welcome the Oversight Board’s consultation on “From the River to the Sea” and gladly submit this commentary to support the Board in making its decision, we would like to point out that these minor consultations are not taking measures that are drastic enough to ensure that Meta would not be held liable for aiding and abetting the genocide in Gaza.