

Public Comment on Meta's content moderation of "from the River to the Sea," from Jewish Voice for Peace (US-based 501(c)(3))

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) is the largest progressive anti-Zionist Jewish organization for Palestinian freedom in the United States and the world. Based in the U.S., JVP is a grassroots organization with over a hundred local groups, as well as a Student Network, Rabbinical Council, Academic Council, and network of Jewish religious and spiritual cohorts. JVP has over 725K followers on Facebook and 1.2M followers on Instagram, one of the largest social media followings of any Jewish organization.

As a Jewish organization working in the U.S. to support Palestinian freedom, we are deeply concerned about Meta's moderation of the phrase "from the River to the Sea" under Meta's Hate Speech, Violence and Incitement, as well as Dangerous Organizations and Individuals policies. Such over-modification and resultant censorship could significantly impact our organization's ability to hold the Israeli government and military accountable for its human rights violations against Palestinians. This is of grave concern, particularly in this moment, as the highest international court has declared it plausible that the Israeli military is committing genocide¹ of Palestinians in Gaza.

The phrase "from the River to the Sea" (and, the most common chant at nonviolent protests, "from the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free") has been adopted by the international movement for equal rights and justice for Palestinians — including the hundreds of thousands of Jewish people that our organization represents — as a commonplace chant and galvanizing call for freedom for all communities in the region.

The phrase refers to the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean sea, where the United Nations has recognized two states, Palestine and Israel. However, in practice, the Israeli government maintains full control over all of that territory, including upholding an illegal military occupation in the West Bank and full control of the Gaza Strip through a 17-year blockade of air, sea and land. The world's most prominent human rights organizations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have concluded² that the Israeli government is maintaining an apartheid system of racial segregation and total domination over Palestinians. The call for freedom and equality in "from the River to the Sea" — that is, the call for justice for Palestinians across the lands of historic Palestine, from which over 75% of the Palestinian

¹ International Court of Justice, *ORDER APPLICATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE IN THE GAZA STRIP (SOUTH AFRICA v. ISRAEL)*, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>, 26 Jan., 2024

² Human Rights Watch, "A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crime of Apartheid and Persecution." April 27, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution#>

Amnesty International, "Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity," Feb 1, 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>

population was expelled by Jewish Zionist militias in 1948³ — is in direct response to these conditions of occupation and oppression.

As the largest Jewish organization for Palestinian rights, our community has adopted the phrase “from the River to the Sea” as a hopeful call for the freedom, equality and justice for all communities in the region — including Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. We believe that the freedom referenced in “from the River to the Sea” means justice for Palestinians, who have been historically dispossessed of lands and rights by the Israeli military and government, as well as for anyone else living in historic Palestine. *And also*, we believe that freedom for Palestinians is vital to ensuring real security and democracy for Jewish Israelis, who are conscripted into the violent, militaristic, and racist project of an ethno-supremacist Jewish state. As a Jewish organization for Palestinian freedom, when our community says “from the River to the Sea,” we mean deeply a call for freedom for *all* of our communities suffering because of Israel’s system of total domination over Palestinian life.

This call for equality and dignity for all people is deeply in line with Jewish values of pursuing justice and extends the proud lineage of Jewish communities working for freedom, for ourselves and for all people. We reject smears against this phrase that suggest it is a call to commit violence against Jewish people. We see any attempts by Meta to moderate this content as such as a dangerous overreach that undermines crucial freedom of expression for human rights defenders.

As a Jewish grassroots organization, which includes many members who are descendents of survivors of a genocide, we are particularly concerned that Meta would choose to further moderate content in support of Palestinian rights or further documentation of Israel’s human rights abuses *while the Israeli military is carrying out an active genocide in Gaza*. The International Court of Justice recently ruled⁴ that it is “plausible” that the Israeli military is committing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and systematically, indiscriminately ethnically cleansing civilians. Israel has already killed over 35,000 Palestinians.

Meta platforms are among the most important mechanisms for Palestinians to document the realities of this genocide and seek support from the international community to hold the Israeli military and government accountable and demand a stop to the violence. This is especially true due to the fact that many traditional journalists and media outlets have been prevented from reporting in Gaza, and that the Israeli military has killed almost 100 journalists over the course of its attack on Gaza.⁵

³ United Nations Palestinian Rights Committee, “About the Nakba,” <https://www.un.org/unispal/about-the-nakba/>

⁴ International Court of Justice, *ORDER APPLICATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE IN THE GAZA STRIP (SOUTH AFRICA v. ISRAEL)*, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>, 26 Jan., 2024

⁵ National Public Radio, “In Gaza, Palestinian journalists are documenting a war they’re also trying to survive,” <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/15/1221513717/gaza-journalists-israel-hamas>, 15 March, 2024

We are *gravely concerned* that censoring content that includes “from the River to the Sea” will bluntly censor large swaths of vital content supporting Palestinian rights and hinder the international solidarity work crucial to holding the Israeli government and military accountable. This includes censoring anti-Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish expressions of solidarity, including timely reporting, mass mobilizations, non-violent demonstrations, and ongoing campaign work to hold the US and Israeli governments accountable for violations of international law. As stated previously, this broad call for freedom has been adopted as a ubiquitous part of statements and mobilizations in support of Palestinian rights, and censoring content using the phrase would dangerously censor vital content.

As a U.S.-based Jewish organization working for a future where all Palestinians and Israelis can live in safety, equality, and dignity, our crucial solidarity work and community organizing is only possible because we are able to uplift Palestinians’ documentation of human rights abuses; share calls for solidarity and support; and amplify mobilizations demanding accountability and policy change. Some steps that Meta could take to ensure that this crucial advocacy and expression can continue to be protected on Meta platforms:

1. Ensure that “from the River to the Sea” and “from the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” are not de-facto moderated (either manually or automatically) as a violation of Meta’s Hate Speech, Violence and Incitement as well as Dangerous Organizations and Individuals policies.
2. Disclose all words and phrases on Meta’s list for automated content moderation, with an emphasis on keywords related to complex political contexts, such as Palestine.