**Submission to the Meta oversight board, 20 May 2024: Regarding the Use of the Slogan ‘From the River to the Sea’**

Submitted on behalf of StandWithUs\*

by

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**The Meaning of the Slogan ‘From the River to the Sea’**

1. **Denial of the Jewish People’s Right to Sovereignty in their Historical Homeland**

The phrase 'From the River to the Sea' has a long and complex history. It has been used by elements within both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since the 1960s, however, it has become largely identified with the call, mainly by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (established in 1964) but also by other violent antiZionist organisations, including Hamas, for the removal of Israel [1] and the establishment of a Palestinian state between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean sea [2]. At best, such a state is premised on the disappearance of the world’s only Jewish state of Israel, a sovereign member of the UN since 1949, as well as an uncertain status for the (currently 7 million) Jews living in Israel today. Almost 1 million Jews fled or were expelled from across the MENA region since 1948, and there are now almost no Jewish communities left in Arab states or Iran. Additionally, both Hamas and Fatah – the two factions that dominate Palestinian politics – systemically promote antisemitism through the many institutions they control. Israeli Jews harbour an understandable fear of the likely treatment they would receive at the hands of a Palestinian government in the territory in which they now live.

Most Israelis would therefore be likely to take up arms to resist the imposition of such a scenario that they would view as an existential threat to the right of the Jewish people to a peaceful life in the context of sovereign self-determination in their historical homeland.

1. **The Genocidal Threat to Jews and Israelis**

The slogan has, however, acquired an even more sinister connotation since the large-scale massacre of Israelis perpetrated by Hamas and their supporters on 7th October 2023. Hamas have long made clear on numerous occasions (including in their founding charter) their genocidal intent towards Jews, and have vowed to repeat the massacre of Israelis 'again and again' until Israel is annihilated. The use of the slogan in the specific context of that attack, particularly on the post-7th October 'pro-Palestine' demonstrations (at which multiple hateful anti-Israeli and antisemitic chants and posters have been in evidence) in public places, university campuses and on social media, removes any doubt that the those who articulate it are aligning themselves, explicitly or implicitly, with the Hamas murderers rather than their Israeli victims – over 1,000 men, women, the elderly, children and babies – who were tortured, raped, mutilated and killed in the most cruel fashion imaginable on the day of the massacre. Tolerance of such expressions of support for terrorist violence has real-world consequences. The UK’s Community Security Trust, that seeks to protect British Jewish communities from the physical manifestations of antisemitism, issued a statement on 14th May 2024 alerting Jews to the need to remain vigilant in the wake of an alleged terrorist plot to attack Jews in Manchester [3].

1. **The Promotion of Anti-Jewish Racism**

Presumably Meta would not countenance the use of their platforms for the promotion of any form of racism, including anti-Jewish racism i.e. antisemitism. Although some argue that calling for the dismantling of Israel is an antiZionist rather than an antisemitic act, the overwhelming majority of Jews are Zionist and thus reject that spurious distinction. In any case, the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of antisemitism [4] emphasises that context is crucial to determining whether or not a statement or behaviour is likely to be antisemitic. As indicated above, the context in relation to the current use of the slogan is unarguably an expression of brutally violent antisemitism as well as violent anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism. The slogan thus constitutes a racist threat to Jews and Israelis worldwide. It should be noted that the IHRA definition commands widespread support across the global Jewish and non-Jewish world [5].

**Conclusions**

1. **The Slogan Promotes a Violent Anti-Israeli and Antisemitic Ideology**

Although the slogan 'From The River to the Sea' need not always amount to approval of and incitement to anti-Israeli or anti-Jewish violence, or the suppression of the human rights of the Israeli and/or Jewish people as enshrined in the UN charter, in the context of the period since the massacre of 7th October 2023, the motivation of those deploying it is clear. Like the swastika symbol (that also has a complex history but is now banned in many countries), the slogan has become inextricably associated with an ideology that promotes horrific anti-Israeli and antisemitic violence.

1. **The Slogan Incites Violence and Undermines Peace**

The perpetrators of the violence of 7th October 2023 – the worst single day’s massacre of Jews since the Holocaust – continue to threaten to unleash further violence towards Israelis and Jews, to the accompaniment of unambiguously supportive mass demonstrations around the world. This show of solidarity with the terrorists is not merely offensive and insensitive; it generates an atmosphere of hatred and incitement to violence against Israelis and Jews that imperils their perceived and actual individual physical safety as well as their collective human rights as a people. Furthermore, permitting such hateful and dangerous incitement to violence undermines social cohesion, promotes division, and empowers those who call for further bloodshed and oppose efforts to achieve peaceful co-existence.

1. **The Slogan Violates Meta’s Declared Policy Standards**

It is hard to understand on what basis the Oversight Board has determined that the slogan does not violate Meta’s community standards, one of which states: ‘We're committed to making Facebook a safe place. We remove content that could contribute to a risk of harm to the physical security of persons. Content that threatens people has the potential to intimidate, exclude or silence others and isn't allowed on Facebook’ [6]. Meta also states [7]: ‘we remove language that incites or facilitates serious violence. We remove content, disable accounts and work with law enforcement when we believe there is a genuine risk of physical harm or direct threats to public safety.’

1. **Meta Should Prohibit the Dissemination of the Slogan on its Platforms**

Accordingly, the dissemination and malign citing of the slogan ‘From the River To the Sea’ on social media should be unequivocally condemned and, where appropriate, prohibited as (with few exceptions) it amounts to hate speech and an incitement to potential abuses of Jewish and/or Israeli human rights. Those potential abuses range from the denial of self-determination of the Jewish and/or Israeli people to the perpetration of violence, murder and even genocide – for the second time within living memory – directed against the Jewish people. History demonstrates that what starts with Jews never ends with Jews. Tolerance for hate speech supportive of terrorism could be the start of the slippery slope that leads eventually to all of us losing our hard-won freedoms.

**The Bottom Line**

**If Meta truly believes in its self-declared policy standards, it should take immediate steps to prohibit across its platforms the malign use of the slogan ‘From the River to the Sea.’**

[1] MEMRI TV, 2nd November 2023. Hamas leader Khaled Mashal: ‘October 7 paved a wide highway towards the removal of Israel.’ <https://x.com/MEMRIReports/status/1719953382687875119>

[2] MEMRI TV, 21st January 2024. Hamas leader Khaled Mashal: ‘October 7 Has Shown that Liberating Palestine from the River to the Sea Is Realistic and Has Already Begun.’ <https://x.com/MEMRIReports/status/1749049490009440569>

[3] Community Security Trust Statement 14th May 2024. <https://x.com/CST_UK/status/1790374837199737306>

[4] International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Working definition of antisemitism. <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>

[5] IHRA Adoptions and Endorsements. <https://www.standwithus.com/ihra>

[6] Facebook Community Standards. <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/>

[7] Meta. Violence and Incitement Policy Rationale. <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/violence-incitement/>