



SUBMISSION TO META ON USE OF THE PHRASE “FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA”

SCOPE

Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) is pleased to respond to the consultation by Meta’s Oversight Board on the use of the phrase “From the river to the sea” on its platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and Threads.

ABOUT CAMPAIGN AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

CAA is a UK-based volunteer-led registered charity, dedicated to exposing and countering antisemitism through education and zero-tolerance enforcement of the law.

CAA has experience in monitoring and combating antisemitism online.

CAA’s polling demonstrates that the problem of antisemitism online is significant and needs to be addressed urgently. Polling of the British Jewish community that we conducted in 2021 with assistance from King’s College London revealed that 96% of British Jews believe that antisemitism on social media is a problem, with a mere 1% believing it is not a problem.

It is likely that this feeling, already almost unanimous three years ago, would be even more intense today, especially following 7th October, which has seen a huge increase of antisemitic content on Meta’s platforms.

We have experience as a trusted partner of several social media networks and understand both the scale of the problem and the varying willingness and capacity of different companies to address it.

MEANING OF “FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA”

The Oversight Board has asked for public comments which address the origin and current uses of the phrase: “From the river to the sea.”

The phrase “From the river to the sea” denotes the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, encompassing the entirety of Israel. This phrase has traditionally been used by various Palestinian and Arab nationalist movements to express their desire for the destruction of the state of Israel and to exercise control over the entire area.

CAA's position is that the slogan is inherently antisemitic.

IHRA DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

On 26th May 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted a definition of antisemitism.

The IHRA definition has since been adopted by a broad spectrum of Jewish organisations, including CAA. It is CAA's position that, as is the case for all groups which are subjected to hatred, Jewish people and organisations are best placed to define language which is prejudicial to them.

Examples of antisemitism cited by the IHRA include "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor" and "Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion."

"From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" only makes sense as a call for the destruction of the world's only Jewish state — and its replacement with a State of Palestine — and is thus an attempt to deny Jews, uniquely, the right to self-determination.

The phrase is also routinely used in conjunction with calls for, and the celebration of, violence against Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere. As such, the slogan falls squarely within the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

The social and psychological impact of the phrase "From the river to the sea" on Jewish communities cannot be overstated. For many Jewish people, the phrase is a stark reminder of centuries of persecution and a present-day threat to their security. The historical memory of expulsions, pogroms, and the Holocaust is deeply ingrained in Jewish consciousness, and calls for the destruction of Israel and the violence and displacement which this would necessarily involve resonate as modern echoes of these historical traumas.

USE OF THE PHRASE BY ANTISEMITIC GROUPS

The phrase has been explicitly used as a rallying cry by organisations which are recognised as terrorist groups by the UK, and Islamist states sanctioned by the UK, which call for the elimination of the State of Israel by violent means and the routine killing of Jewish people around the world.

Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Hamas uses the phrase in its Charter, which states: "Hamas believes that no part of the land of Palestine shall be compromised or conceded, irrespective of the causes, the circumstances and the pressures and no matter how long the occupation lasts. Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine from the river to the

sea.” The charter further rejects peace and calls for armed struggle, “resistance and jihad for the liberation of Palestine will remain a legitimate right, a duty and an honour for all the sons and daughters of our people and our Ummah”, and states: “Resisting the occupation with all means and methods is a legitimate right guaranteed by divine laws and by international norms and laws. At the heart of these lies armed resistance, which is regarded as the strategic choice for protecting the principles and the rights of the Palestinian people.” This harkens to the 1988 Hamas charter, which called for violence against Jewish people around the world: “The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree, (evidently a certain kind of tree) would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews.”

Thus, Hamas’ call to armed struggle which, as it was revealed on 7th October, includes the savage, cold-blooded, targeted murder, torture, rape and hostage taking of civilians, including children, is inextricably tied to the rallying cry of “From the river to the sea”.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad has also used the phrase, suggesting that it is impermissible to allow any part of the state of Israel to remain.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah’s secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah routinely uses the phrase at rallies, stating: “Palestine from the river to the sea is the property of the Palestinian people” and that “the elimination of Israel” is “the interest of the entire Muslim world and the entire Arab world.” He has stressed for years that “what the Arabs have wanted for 60 years is...for the land from the [Jordan] River to the [Mediterranean] Sea to be returned” to the Palestinian people and has also said that “Israel must be wiped out of existence.”

The Islamic Republic of Iran

In the wake of the 7th October attacks, the late President Ebrahim Raisi stated that “the only solution” for the Israel-Hamas war is “the establishment of the Palestinian state from the river to the sea.” As such, the horrific attacks of 7th October were clearly aligned with the vision of many of those using the slogan.

USE OF THE PHRASE SINCE 7TH OCTOBER

CAA has been monitoring anti-Israel protests in the UK, before and since the 7th October terrorist attack in Israel. The slogan “From the river to the sea” has routinely been used alongside expressions of support for Hamas and the targeting of Jewish individuals and institutions. For example, chants of “From the river to the sea” at a march in London on 14th October, were accompanied by expressions of support for Hamas, such as the paraglider logo, and calls for intifada and claims that there is “only one solution”.

Such is the strength of the association between the phrase and support for organisations such as Hamas that Labour MP Andy McDonald was suspended from the Labour Party Whip for using the phrase at a rally. Further, the Metropolitan Police Service exercises restrictions on the use of the phrase around Jewish institutions.

THE ONLINE SAFETY ACT 2023

The Oversight Board's consultation comes in the context of the Online Safety Act 2023 (the Act) starting to come into force. The Act is expected to be fully implemented by 2025.

The Act requires companies to take robust action against illegal content and activity, and to take proactive action against priority offences. Priority offences include racially or religiously aggravated public order offences and terrorist offences, both of which may be committed in the course of the use of the phrase "From the river to the sea".

Platforms will be required to implement measures to reduce the risk of their services being used for illegal offending. They will also need to put in place systems for removing illegal content when it does appear.

Meta's platforms fall within the definition of major user-to-user online platforms (Category 1). As such, they will also be required to proactively offer tools to help users reduce the likelihood of encountering antisemitic content on its platforms.

RECOMMENDATION

The phrase "From the river to the sea" is plainly antisemitic in view of its historical usage, the political implications its usage, and the existential threat it poses to the state of Israel and Jewish people. While it is seen by some as a simple call for freedom, its associations with extremist groups and the implied negation of Israel's right to exist render it deeply problematic.

Whilst we understand that Meta is reluctant to ban phrases outright, the use of the phrase "From the river to the sea" on Meta's platforms is likely to constitute hate speech or even in some cases support for terrorist organisations.

In line with Meta's public commitments to build community and bring the world closer together, we urge Meta to prohibit the use of this highly problematic slogan as a call to arms or rallying cry, in order to keep Meta's platforms safe for the Jewish community.