

May 22, 2024

**RE: Oversight Board announces new cases on posts that include “From the river to the sea”**

On behalf of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, we are writing to encourage Meta to keep up posts containing the phrase “from the river to the sea.” Attempts to frame all uses of this phrase as inherently antisemitic or calling for violence against Jews purposefully misrepresent how most English-speaking advocates use the phrase. A blanket ban of this phrase would unfairly censor pro-Palestinian and Arab American voices using the phrase to call for peace and rally support for the people of Palestine.

*Current use and origin of phrase:*

On Meta platforms, users have invoked the slogan across a wide variety of posts, including fundraisers for humanitarian relief, calls for a ceasefire, coverage and planning of protests, infographics, and artwork. As Yousef Munayyer, head of the Palestine/Israel Program at the Arab Center Washington DC, puts it, when protestors and advocates use the phrase, they are drawing attention to the fact that “Palestinians live along with Israelis, but it's the Palestinians that don't have freedom...They don't have justice. They don't have equality. They don't have safety. They don't have security.”<sup>1</sup> The phrase, which references the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, gained popularity among Palestinians in the 1960s expressing a desire to break “free” from the control of Israeli, Egyptian, and Jordanian governments.

While many point to Hamas’ use of a version of the phrase as an excuse to associate it with violence, historians note there has “never been an ‘official Palestinian position calling for the forced removal of Jews from Palestine.”<sup>2</sup> Importantly, the phrase does not rhyme in its original Arabic and the specific English phrase “from the river to the sea” is employed almost exclusively by western protestors advocating for Palestinian rights.<sup>3</sup> In the face of attempts to misrepresent the meaning of the saying, some pro-Palestinian activists have even urged for slight tweaks of the phrase to elucidate its purpose; for example, “from the river to the sea, we want full equality!” is a proposed alternative.<sup>4</sup> On English-language social media, those who invoke this phrase are not calling for violence, and it would be wrong to categorize the slogan as hate speech.

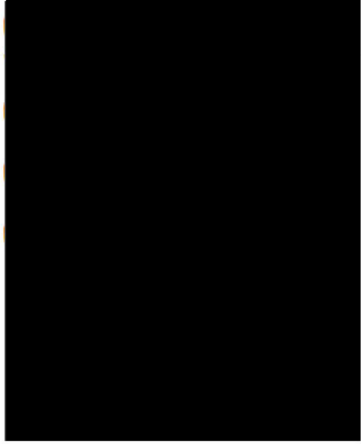
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<sup>1</sup><https://www.tpr.org/history/2023-11-09/how-interpretations-of-the-phrase-from-the-river-to-the-sea-made-it-so-divisive>

<sup>2</sup> <https://jewishcurrents.org/what-does-from-the-river-to-the-sea-really-mean>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/from-the-river-to-the-sea-what-does-the-palestinian-slogan-really-mean>

<sup>4</sup> <https://truthout.org/articles/dont-buy-the-right-wing-disinformation-campaign-on-from-the-river-to-the-sea/>



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A palestine free from decades of illegal occupation. Free from oppression. Unburdened by land and resource theft. Free from discrimination.

A haven for Palestinians where they can exercise their right to return and determine their own destiny.

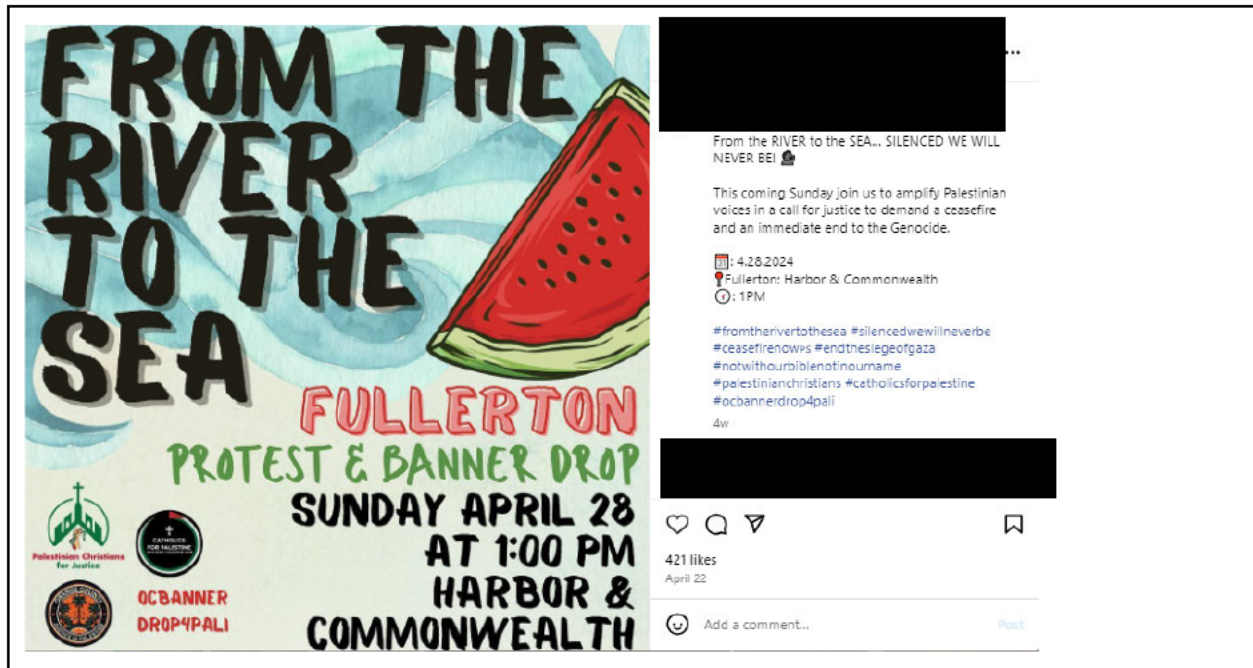
A Palestine safe for its children. A place where the Palestinian identity that's deeply rooted in its ancestral soil can finally flourish.

And yes, Palestine will be free ❤️

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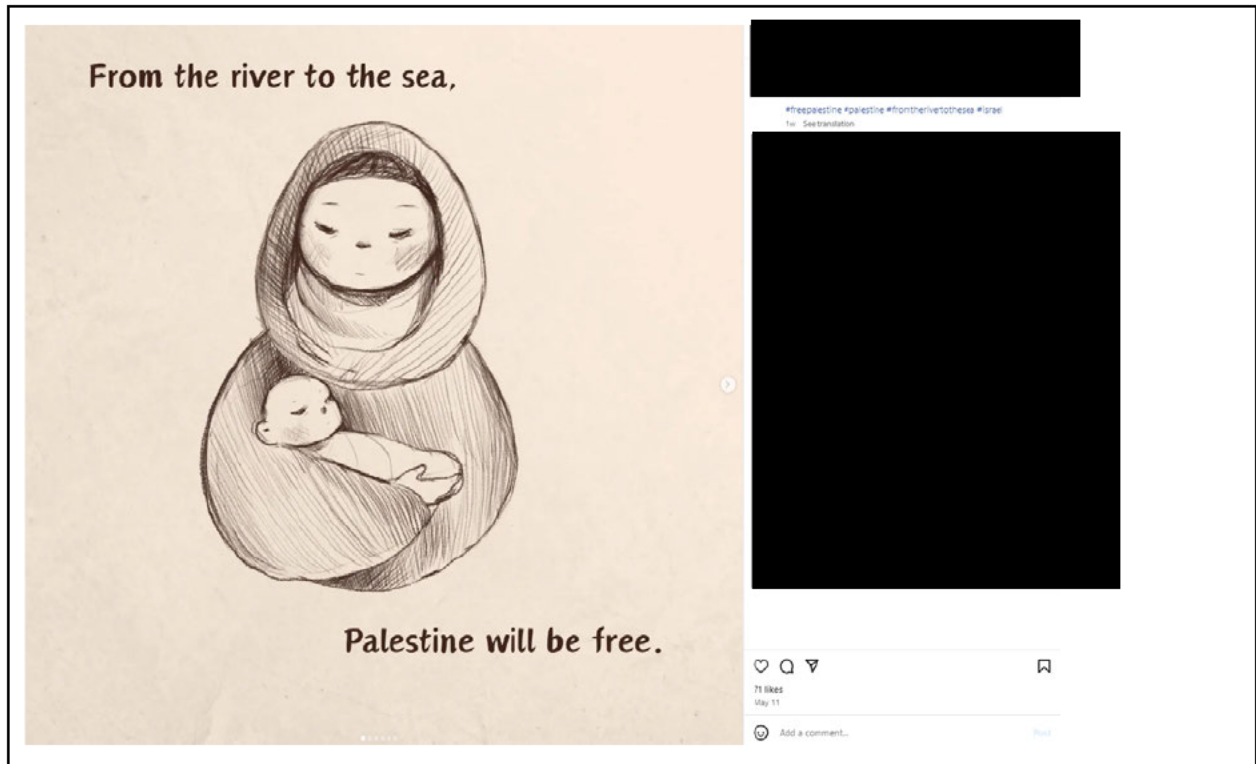
### *Distortions rooted in Islamophobia*

“Deliberate mischaracterizations” of “from the river to the sea” are unfortunately rooted in Islamophobia and characterizations of Muslims as violent and untrustworthy.<sup>5</sup> As congresswoman Rashida Tlaib describes, to her and many Palestinians using the phrase now, saying “from the river to the sea” is an “aspirational call for freedom, human rights, and peaceful coexistence, not death, destruction, or hate.” Casting aside Palestinian voices like Tlaib’s, many lawmakers with track records of marked anti-Muslim bias<sup>6</sup> helped to pass a recent House resolution that misleadingly declares the phrase as constituting a call “for the removal of the Jewish people from their ancestral homeland.” On Instagram, mothers embracing babies, children, doves, and flowers are often the images that accompany captions or graphics containing the phrase “from the river to the sea.” To quote the board’s own words, it is ridiculous that certain politicians and the media have so heavily distorted a phrase used to “advocate for the dignity and human rights of Palestinians” that it is perceived as “promoting violence or supporting terrorism.”

<sup>5</sup> <https://jewishcurrents.org/what-does-from-the-river-to-the-sea-really-mean>

<sup>6</sup> As detailed in a May 2024 [Truthout](#) article, this includes denying the existence of innocent Palestinians, and suggesting Gaza should be like “Nagasaki and Hiroshima.”





*Recommendation*

Demands for equality and human dignity should not be twisted to be construed as threats or calls for violence against Jews. Campaigns to malign “from the river to the sea” as violent neglect the nuance and context associated with the phrase. Meta should focus its attention on *actual antisemitic content* proliferating on its platforms rather than capitulate to fearmongering tactics that distort a phrase used by pro-Palestinian activists to smear peaceful protests and distract from the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Meta should stand by its original decision and keep the three reported posts—and others like it—online.

Sincerely,  
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