

**Submission  
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## **MEASURES TO PROHIBIT SLOGANS THAT INCITE HATRED**

**Organisation:** Mission of Hope

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**Email:**

[info@missionofhope.org.au](mailto:info@missionofhope.org.au)

**Web:**

[www.missionofhope.org.au](http://www.missionofhope.org.au)

Mission of Hope  
29 Kitchener Parade  
Bankstown  
NSW 2200  
Tel 02 9709 5311  
[www.missionofhope.org.au](http://www.missionofhope.org.au)

## ***Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry***

### **Measures to Prohibit Protest Slogans that Incite Hatred**

**Submitted by:**

**Mission of Hope**

Australian Muslim Mental Health Organisation

[www.missionofhope.org.au](http://www.missionofhope.org.au)

**Author:**

**Hanan Dover**

Clinical and Forensic Psychologist

Palestinian-Australian

#### **Author's Biography**

**Hanan Dover** is a Clinical and Forensic Psychologist and a Palestinian-Australian mental health professional with over two decades of experience working across clinical practice, community mental health, trauma, and culturally responsive psychological services.

She is the Founder and current President of Mission of Hope, one of Australia's longest-serving Muslim community mental health organisations, providing psychological services, crisis support, and wellbeing programs to Muslim and multicultural communities across New South Wales. Her work focuses on trauma-informed care, collective and intergenerational trauma, identity-based harm, and the mental health impacts of racism, Islamophobia, and political violence.

Hanan Dover is also an academic and lecturer in Islamic Psychology at Charles Sturt University, and has led the development of university-accredited programs integrating

psychological science with culturally and spiritually informed frameworks. She has contributed extensively to professional training, policy submissions, and community education initiatives addressing trauma, social cohesion, and mental health equity.

Her professional expertise sits at the intersection of clinical psychology, the psychology of language, collective trauma, and community wellbeing, Palestinian lived experience, displacement, and the psychosocial impacts of silencing and misrepresentation. consequences of public policy and discourse affecting marginalised communities.

## **1. Introduction and Organisational Context**

Mission of Hope is one of Australia's longest-serving Muslim community mental health organisations, providing culturally responsive mental health services, trauma recovery programs, and community wellbeing initiatives to Muslim and multicultural communities across New South Wales.

Our work is grounded in evidence-based mental health and informed by trauma-informed, culturally responsive frameworks that recognise the profound impact of racism, political violence, forced displacement, and collective trauma on mental health (Herman, 1992; Kirmayer et al., 2014).

This submission is informed by:

- Clinical and community-based psychological practice
- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive mental health frameworks
- The lived experiences of Palestinian communities in Australia
- Evidence from psychology, linguistics, and collective trauma research

This submission addresses the Inquiry from a psychological and community wellbeing perspective, complementing but not duplicating legal analyses already before the Committee. It focuses on the psychology of language, the harm of decontextualisation, cultural identity, and the mental health implications of criminalising political expression.

## **2. The Psychology of Language and Meaning-Making**

When Arabic language itself becomes treated as inherently suspicious, this has measurable psychological consequences for Muslim and Arab communities, including heightened anxiety, hypervigilance, and withdrawal from civic participation.

Psychological science has long established that language is not neutral. Language shapes cognition, identity, emotional processing, and social meaning (Bruner, 1990; Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1956). Thus, language is understood as:

- A carrier of meaning, identity, and memory
- A tool for emotional processing and collective sense-making
- A mechanism for expressing distress, grief, resistance, and hope

From a psychological standpoint, meaning is contextual, relational, and culturally mediated. The same word or phrase can carry profoundly different meanings depending on:

- Who is speaking
- Who is listening
- Historical and cultural context
- Power dynamics
- Lived experience

### **Misuse and Decontextualisation of Arabic Terms**

Terms such as *intifada* are Arabic words with historical, linguistic, and political meanings that do not translate cleanly into English political shorthand.

From a psychological standpoint, treating words or slogans as having a single, fixed meaning regardless of context is inconsistent with contemporary understandings of human communication and meaning-making (Bruner, 1990). Decontextualising language increases the risk of misinterpretation, projection, and fear-based responses, particularly when the language belongs to racialised or minoritised groups.

This process:

- Collapses complex meanings into fear-based interpretations
- Reinforces racialised threat narratives
- Pathologises the political speech of minority communities
- Contributes to collective misrecognition and dehumanization

It is important to challenge how language is being framed and weaponised.

## **Palestinian Meaning and Use of Key Protest Phrases**

### ***“From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free”***

From a Palestinian cultural, historical, and psychological perspective, the phrase “*From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*” is primarily understood as an expression of collective aspiration for freedom, dignity, and equal rights, rather than a call for violence or harm toward another group.

Peer-reviewed and scholarly analyses consistently indicate that, among Palestinians, the phrase functions as:

- A geographic reference to a homeland fragmented by displacement and occupation
- A symbolic articulation of freedom and self-determination
- A means of naming historical continuity, particularly in the context of forced displacement and statelessness

Elhalaby et al. (2023), in a comprehensive academic primer authored by historians, legal scholars, and anthropologists, emphasise that Palestinians commonly use the phrase to articulate a desire for freedom, justice, and political recognition, and that its meaning is not fixed or inherently eliminatory, but varies by speaker, context, and political vision.

Psychologically, this aligns with established trauma literature demonstrating that populations experiencing collective trauma often rely on symbolic language to preserve identity and articulate hope when material conditions are constrained (Hirschberger, 2018; Volkan, 2001).

Importantly, Palestinian scholars note that many Palestinians explicitly interpret the phrase as:

- A call for equal rights for all people living in historic Palestine, whether through one-state or two-state political imaginaries
- A rejection of systems of domination rather than of people

Nassar (2021) situates the slogan within Palestinian nationalist discourse as an attempt to reassert Palestinian presence and humanity after decades of erasure, rather than an endorsement of violence.

From a psychological standpoint, suppressing such language risks reinforcing identity invalidation, which research associates with increased distress, anger, and disengagement from democratic processes (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007; Salter et al., 2018).

### **“Intifada”**

The Arabic term “*intifada*” derives from the root *nafada*, meaning “to shake off”. Within Palestinian discourse, the term has historically been used to describe popular uprisings against structural oppression, not inherently or exclusively violent action.

With particular reference to the term *intifada*, it is worth stating clearly that the two Palestinian intifadas did not emerge in a vacuum. They arose largely in response to Israeli actions, including the killing of Palestinians and, in the case of the Second Intifada, the highly provocative visit to the Temple Mount. Context matters. To strip the term *intifada* of its historical and political context and portray Palestinians as violent instigators is both psychologically and historically inaccurate. Within Palestinian understanding, the term sits within a framework of resistance and defence in the face of prolonged occupation and systemic violence, not inherent aggression.

Scholarly analyses of the First Palestinian Intifada (1987–1993) consistently document that it involved:

- Mass civil resistance
- Strikes and boycotts
- Community organising
- Youth-led protest
- Non-violent collective action alongside episodes of violence

Critically, Palestinian scholars and sociologists emphasise that *intifada* is not synonymous with terrorism within Palestinian meaning systems, but rather reflects a psychosocial response to prolonged occupation and dispossession (Khalidi, 1997; Pearlman, 2011).

From a psychological perspective, the term functions as:

- A collective coping mechanism
- A way of naming resistance to chronic humiliation and powerlessness
- A symbolic assertion of agency in contexts of structural violence

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice, drawing on expert evidence, explicitly recognised that *intifada* is understood by many Palestinians as a call for uprising against oppression, which may include non-violent protest, and that automatic attribution of antisemitic or violent intent reflects racialised misinterpretation rather than linguistic accuracy (University of Toronto v Doe et al., 2024).

Psychological research on collective action supports this understanding, showing that oppressed groups often use resistance language to restore agency, dignity, and group cohesion, particularly when formal political avenues are blocked (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Klar & Kasser, 2009).

What remains deeply concerning is that, since September 11, we have witnessed the continued and deliberate racialisation of the Arabic language, driven by suspicion, misinformation, and uncorrected false claims. This has not occurred accidentally. It has been enabled and normalised through political leadership.

### **Psychological Harm of Misattributing Meaning**

From a clinical and community psychology perspective, imposing external meanings onto minority language produces predictable harms.

Misattributing Palestinian expressions of resistance as inherently violent:

- Invalidates lived experience
- Reinforces collective trauma
- Fuels Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism
- Increases mistrust in institutions

Research demonstrates that such misrecognition contributes to identity threat, heightened vigilance, and withdrawal from civic participation (Nadal et al., 2014; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007).

Moreover, trauma-informed frameworks caution that suppressing symbolic expressions of grief and resistance exacerbates distress rather than preventing harm (Herman, 1992; Bloom & Farragher, 2011).

### **Relevance to the Inquiry**

Understanding how Palestinians themselves use and understand these terms is essential to:

- Avoid culturally inaccurate policy
- Prevent unintended psychological harm
- Uphold social cohesion grounded in evidence rather than fear
- Ensure that regulation targets conduct and intent, not identity-linked language

From a mental health perspective, language divorced from its cultural meaning becomes a tool of harm rather than protection.

### **3. The Harm of False Attribution and Moral Panic**

The framing of contested protest language as inherently threatening reflects processes well documented in moral panic literature, where symbolic acts are exaggerated and reframed as existential threats to social order (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009).

Psychological research on intergroup threat demonstrates that symbolic threats, including language, are often perceived as more dangerous when associated with minority groups, even in the absence of behavioural violence (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Such dynamics fuel fear-based policy responses that may inadvertently escalate social tension rather than reduce harm, mirroring well-documented processes in moral panic psychology:

- Fear amplification
- Scapegoating
- Projection
- Group homogenisation

False attribution of intent, particularly when repeated by authority figures, undermines trust, amplifies distress, and reinforces collective anxiety within targeted communities.

Thus, when authorities or public figures assert that chants were made when they were not, or attribute violent intent without verification, this:

- Undermines trust in institutions
- Reinforces collective trauma
- Validates Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian narratives
- Escalates community distress rather than reducing harm

For communities already experiencing grief due to mass violence abroad, this dynamic compounds psychological injury.

#### **4. Cultural Identity, Naming, and the Palestinian Lived Experience**

Research consistently demonstrates that racialising or religiously marking language as suspicious contributes to heightened anxiety, hypervigilance, identity threat, and psychological distress among affected communities (Nadal et al., 2014; Salter et al., 2018; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007).

When Arabic words or Palestinian political expressions are framed as inherently violent or extremist, the psychological message conveyed is one of collective suspicion. This contributes to Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism, which are associated with poorer mental health outcomes, withdrawal from civic engagement, and increased feelings of alienation (Nadal et al., 2014; Kirmayer et al., 2014).

Naming one's experience is a core therapeutic principle in trauma recovery. Silencing language that communities use to describe oppression, displacement, and loss is psychologically destabilising.

For Palestinians, language is one of the few remaining tools of:

- Identity preservation
- Historical continuity
- Resistance to erasure
- Collective mourning

When expressions of Palestinian identity are reframed as threatening or criminal, the psychological message received is:

*“Your pain is illegitimate. Your grief is dangerous. Your identity is suspect.”*

This has predictable consequences:

- Increased psychological distress
- Disengagement from democratic processes
- Internalised shame
- Intergenerational transmission of trauma

From a mental health perspective, this is counter-therapeutic and socially destabilising.

## **5. Protest as a Psychosocial and Healing Process**

Social psychological research recognises peaceful protest as a legitimate and often protective response to injustice. Participation in collective action has been shown to restore agency, reduce feelings of helplessness, and foster psychological empowerment (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Klar & Kasser, 2009). Thus, peaceful protest functions as a coping mechanism, restoring agency and mitigating helplessness. Existing psychological literature recognises peaceful protest as:

- A form of collective coping
- A mechanism for restoring agency
- A protective factor against helplessness and despair
- A means of communal regulation of grief and anger

For communities experiencing moral injury and vicarious trauma due to mass violence, protest serves as a non-violent outlet for emotional regulation and meaning-making. Suppressing these avenues may increase alienation and psychological distress rather than enhance public safety (Jost et al., 2017). Thus, for communities witnessing mass civilian death, displacement, and suffering, protest serves as:

- A socially sanctioned outlet for moral distress
- A way to bear witness
- A way to prevent psychological numbing and disengagement

Research on political radicalisation consistently demonstrates that suppressing non-violent political expression increases grievance, disengagement, and susceptibility to more extreme pathways (Horgan, 2008; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Thus,

criminalising language without contextual behavioural assessment risks producing the opposite of its intended effect by:

- Driving distress underground
- Increasing radicalisation risk rather than reducing it
- Severing communities from non-violent avenues of expression
- weakening trust between communities and institutions.

### **6. Impact on Social Cohesion and Community Wellbeing**

Trauma-informed policy approaches emphasise safety, trust, collaboration, and empowerment as foundations for social cohesion (Bloom & Farragher, 2011; Purtle, 2020).

Evidence indicates that education, dialogue, and contextual assessment are more effective at reducing harm than punitive or symbolic bans, particularly when dealing with contested language and identity-based expression (Kirmayer & Jarvis, 2019).

Social cohesion is not achieved by silencing one group's language to soothe another's discomfort. Suppressing non-violent political expression increases alienation and risk rather than reducing harm. Psychologically sustainable cohesion requires:

- Recognition of multiple lived realities
- Nuanced understanding of contested language
- Contextual assessment rather than blanket assumptions
- Investment in education rather than criminalisation

Policies that disproportionately target the language of racialised or religious minorities risk:

- Entrenching grievance
- Validating extremist narratives
- Increasing polarisation
- Undermining public mental health

## **7. Recommendations**

From a psychological and community wellbeing perspective, Mission of Hope recommends:

1. **Reject blanket bans on slogans or phrases** that have contested meanings and no intrinsic violent content.
2. **Adopt context-based assessments**, focusing on behaviour, intent, and accompanying conduct rather than words in isolation.
3. **Invest in community dialogue and education**, including linguistically and culturally informed public education.
4. **Engage mental health and community experts**, not only security frameworks, in policy development.
5. **Acknowledge the therapeutic and democratic role of peaceful protest**, particularly for traumatised communities.
6. **Avoid policy responses that inadvertently racialise language**, especially Arabic terms, as inherently threatening.

## **8. Conclusion**

As a Muslim mental health organisation, and as a Palestinian psychologist, we are deeply concerned that proposed restrictions risk causing more psychological harm than protection.

Language, when misused by those in power, can retraumatise communities already carrying immense grief. Policies grounded in fear rather than evidence undermine healing, trust, and social cohesion.

A trauma-informed society does not criminalise grief.  
A democratic society does not fear non-violent language.

The concerns raised in this submission are supported by a peer-reviewed psychological literature on language, trauma, collective identity, protest, and social cohesion (see References). This literature consistently demonstrates that decontextualising language, suppressing non-violent political expression, and racialising speech increase psychological harm and social fragmentation rather than reduce risk.

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**Email:**

[info@missionofhope.org.au](mailto:info@missionofhope.org.au)

**Web:**

[www.missionofhope.org.au](http://www.missionofhope.org.au)

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