

**Submission  
No 66**

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

**Organisation:** Free Palestine Townsville

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# Submission to the NSW Parliament Inquiry into Banning Protest Slogans

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## **Introduction**

Free Palestine Townsville opposes proposals to ban or criminalise political slogans, including phrases such as "globalise the intifada" and "from the river to the sea". We are deeply concerned that this legislation will undermine democratic rights, increase discrimination against Palestinian and Muslim communities, and fail to address the actual sources of hate and violence threatening community safety in Australia.

The submission is based on academic scholarship and expertise in fields of peace studies, critical terrorism studies, and human rights.

## **Protecting Communities from Hatred, Intimidation and Violence**

The Free Palestine movement in Australia stands against all forms of hate, racism and violence. These, in fact, are the roots of the genocide in Palestine. Our movement calls on Australia to respect the human rights principles that we are legally bound to uphold—that every human being should be free from fear and violence. These principles must be respected to protect both the international community and Australia from hate and violence.

We recognise that the same logic that motivates violence in Palestine is the same that motivates terrorist violence, such as the tragic attack at Bondi Beach. In both cases, innocent people are killed not because of any crimes they have committed, but because entire communities are first constructed as "the enemy" or as lesser human beings, and this dehumanisation is then used to justify violence. We reject this logic entirely.

We are deeply concerned about the rise of hate in Australia. Many communities are feeling increasingly unsafe. It has become more common in Australian politics to incite hatred against immigrants, First Nations people, Muslims, and other communities, including the Jewish community. Unfortunately, we are concerned that this proposed legislation does not promote social cohesion and trust in the community, but rather risks further marginalising and criminalising social groups that are already at risk of violence.

## **The Dangerous Conflation of the Pro-Palestine Movement with Terrorism**

The official motivation for this inquiry states that "horrific recent events also show that the chant 'globalise the intifada' is hate speech and encouraging of violence in our community." However, what is the basis for such a claim? How do these slogans have any connection whatsoever to the Bondi attack? This connection is not based on fact, inquiry, or research.

What is known is that the attackers were linked to ISIS, not to the pro-Palestine movement. Such correlation appears to be based on two assumptions. First, the attempts at labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitism, or hatred of the Jewish community, despite this being explicitly rejected by the Free Palestine movement. Second, since the attackers were Muslims, all Muslims and Arabs are constructed as suspected terrorists. Suspicion towards the pro-Palestine movement is therefore rooted in the broader logic that treats Muslims and Arabs as inherently [dangerous](#).

Australia faces documented threats from far-right and white supremacist violence, not from pro-Palestine activism. Reports show that Islamophobic incidents—including verbal and physical attacks on Muslim women, bomb hoaxes, and mosque and school evacuations—more than doubled between January 2023 and November 2024. ([sbs.com.au](#)) These incidents are part of a broader surge in extremist violence that also targets First Nations communities and other minority groups. For example, in August 2025, members of a neo-Nazi network violently stormed Camp Sovereignty, a First Nations protest site in Melbourne, injuring people and desecrating culturally significant symbols, an attack widely condemned as racially and politically motivated. ([thenewdaily.com.au](#)) Alongside this, let us not forget that the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings—carried out by an Australian white supremacist who murdered 51 Muslims.

The fact that we know is that the shooters were linked to ISIS, and this is what the police efforts should focus on. ISIS and similar extremist groups have nothing to do with Palestine, in fact they have inflicted violence on Palestinian refugee camps. Conflating ISIS with the pro-Palestine movement puts together completely opposed ideologies: one that stands for hate and violence, and one that is about freedom and human rights. This conflation only makes sense through a logic that treats all Muslims and Palestine supporters as dangerous, which is based on prejudice without evidence.

The Jewish Council of Australia has organised a petition to stop politicising the Bondi attack for political purposes and to prevent the silencing of pro-Palestinian voices. This demonstrates that even within the Jewish community, there is recognition that it is inappropriate to use these horrific events as a political tool to silence a legitimate social movement.

### **The Meaning and Legitimacy of Pro-Palestinian Slogans**

It is essential to understand what these proposed banned slogans actually mean. "Globalise the intifada" refers to resistance for freedom of the Palestinian people—it does not call for violence. In its historical and political context, *intifada* refers to a broad spectrum of resistance practices including mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, strikes, and boycotts, rather than a call to harm civilians. The Palestinian people have a right to self-determination, which is enshrined in Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Australia ratified in 1980.

Palestinians also have the right to be protected from genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and many other documented crimes committed by Israel.

Similarly, "from the river to the sea" has been used by both Israelis and Palestinians. It does not call for violence against anyone, but rather expresses the aspiration for all people in the region to live in freedom and dignity. Both of these slogans are legitimate expressions of political opinion.

There is no correlation between such slogans and violence. Pro-Palestine protests across Australia have been overwhelmingly peaceful and nonviolent, with participation from Jewish people and organisations.

## **Defining Hate Speech**

If Australia is to regulate hate speech, any definition and implementation must align with established academic scholarship and international human rights standards. The United Nations Rabat Plan of Action clarifies that not all offensive or controversial speech constitutes hate speech and sets a high threshold for restriction. Under this framework, hate speech is understood as expression that reaches the level of incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence against a protected group, assessed in light of context, speaker, intent, content, extent, and the likelihood of harm.

Consistent with this standard, two core elements are required for speech to qualify as hate speech. First, there must be an explicit or implicit incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. This includes calls for physical harm, expulsion, exclusion, or the denial of fundamental rights. Second, such incitement must be directed against a specific group defined by protected characteristics, such as nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion.

Pro-Palestinian slogans such as "globalise the intifada" and "from the river to the sea" do not meet either of these elements. They do not contain explicit or implicit calls to violence, discrimination, or hostility against any protected group. Nor are they directed at Jewish people or any other community. Rather, they are expressions of political opposition to occupation, apartheid, and state violence, and calls for freedom, self-determination, and equal rights—forms of political expression that are protected under international human rights law.

When assessed according to the Rabat Plan's criteria of context, intent, and likelihood of harm, these slogans fall well below the threshold of hate speech. Their use within overwhelmingly peaceful protests, including protests involving Jewish participants and organisations, further demonstrates that they do not function as incitement to harm. Criminalising such expressions would therefore constitute an unjustified restriction on political speech rather than a legitimate measure to prevent hatred or violence.

In contrast, there are more rallies in Australia where slogans such as "send them back" are chanted against migrants. These slogans explicitly call for the expulsion of a specific group based on their national origin or migration status. Yet no hate speech legislation has been proposed to regulate these genuinely hostile expressions.

If we want to effectively stop hate speech that can dangerously lead to violence, research on inter-group violence demonstrates that creating and institutionalising narratives that

systematically portray a group as an enemy, as criminal, or as inferior creates the social conditions under which violence becomes possible. Victimhood narratives that blame an entire group for grievances such as economic strain or insecurity are particularly dangerous. For example, the field of Critical Terrorism Studies has documented how Muslims were constructed as dangerous enemies during the War on Terror, creating the conditions for discrimination and violence against Muslim communities.

### **Distinguishing Criticism of State Violence from Hatred of Communities**

The pro-Palestine movement in Australia is very clear about the difference between standing against genocide and violence conducted by the Israeli state, and hatred against Jewish people, which we do not accept. It is dangerous to conflate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. This would be like saying that criticising our Prime Minister or Australian foreign policy means we are hateful towards Australians. If we accepted this logic, there would be an end to democracy altogether—nobody would be allowed to have any political opinion, and nobody would be allowed to call out corruption or violence.

We should acknowledge that many Jewish people and organisations reject this conflation and definition of antisemitism. By institutionalising this definition, we risk neglecting actual antisemitism—hatred against Jewish people—which is dangerous to the community, as we tragically saw at Bondi. Genuine antisemitism is alive and rising, particularly among far-right groups. We call on authorities to work on protecting the Jewish community and all other communities from actual hate, rather than silencing legitimate political expression.

We believe that a sustainable peace for Palestine would also contribute to more peace, security, and healing from ongoing trauma for people in Israel.

### **Australia's International Human Rights Obligations**

The proposed legislation risks violating two essential principles: the freedom to protest, and protection from war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. These protections are designed to safeguard citizens nationally and internationally. If Australia intends to follow the UK example cited as 'best practice' in this inquiry—imprisoning Australian citizens for peacefully exercising their constitutional rights while standing for peace, banning and criminalising community groups who have never committed crimes other than advocating for peace, with no evidence or trial for any acts of violence—this constitutes a dangerous precedent for our country that puts at risk our core democratic principles.

Australia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects freedom of expression under Article 19 and freedom of peaceful assembly under Article 21.

The Australian Constitution also contains an implied freedom of political communication, which is essential to our democracy. Banning specific political slogans directly restricts political communication and the right to peaceful protest. Political expression opposing occupation, apartheid, or state violence should be protected, not singled out for punishment.

Furthermore, Australia ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1949. Under this Convention, Australia has legal obligations to prevent and punish genocide. The pro-Palestine movement calls on Australia to uphold these obligations by standing against what many legal experts, human rights organisations, and countries including South Africa have identified as genocide in Gaza. Silencing those who advocate for compliance with the Genocide Convention undermines Australia's own international legal commitments.

Education, dialogue, anti-racism initiatives, and the application of existing criminal law are far more effective ways to address hatred and violence than banning words or phrases that call for freedom and human rights.

### **Recommendations to Protecting Communities and Preventing Hate Crimes**

Rather than criminalising political speech, Free Palestine Townsville recommends the following evidence-based approaches to genuinely protect communities and prevent hate crimes:

- 1. Social Cohesion Initiatives:** Provide funding and support to initiatives that promote social cohesion among all groups in Australian society. This should include community education, dialogue programs, and intercultural initiatives that bring people together and break down stereotypes. These initiatives should involve not only specific ethnic or religious communities, but all Australians, fostering mutual understanding and solidarity.
- 2. Review Government and Police Messaging and Practices:** Government agencies and police must review their messaging and practices to ensure they do not profile certain communities as criminal or dangerous. Instead, authorities should use language and practices that support multicultural trust and solidarity. This includes avoiding rhetoric that constructs entire communities as threats and ensuring policing is non-discriminatory.
- 3. Investigate Racism and Hate-Motivated Violence:** Draft a comprehensive strategy to better assess and protect all communities at risk of hate-motivated violence.
- 4. Reject Proposals to Ban Political Slogans:** Reject all proposals to ban or criminalise slogans such as "from the river to the sea" or those related to intifada that call for freedom, dignity, and self-determination. Recognise these as legitimate political expression protected under international human rights law and the Australian Constitution.
- 5. Protect Constitutional Rights:** Affirm and protect the constitutional rights of peaceful assembly and protest. These rights are fundamental to Australian democracy and must not be undermined.

Submitted by Monica Carrer, PhD  
Lead Organiser, Free Palestine Townsville  
Peace and Conflict Studies researcher