

**Submission
No 117**

MEASURES TO PROHIBIT SLOGANS THAT INCITE HATRED

Name: Dr Nick Riemer

Date Received: 12 January 2026

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into measures to prohibit slogans that incite hatred

Nick Riemer

Introduction

1. I am making this submission in two capacities: as an academic specialist on language and meaning at the University of Sydney, where I am a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics; and as a long-term advocate for justice for Palestinian and other global justice causes who has been a regular participant in, and speaker at, the Sydney demonstrations.
2. My academic expertise is relevant to the questions before the inquiry in two respects. First, I am a specialist in semantics, the area of linguistics which specifically studies questions of the meaning of words and phrases, and of how these meanings change in specific contexts. I am the author of numerous academic works on these questions, including a standard introduction to the field (*Introducing Semantics*, Cambridge University Press, 2010). Second, I have published scholarly work on questions of free speech and hate speech specifically in the context of Palestine activism, subjects which also feature in my undergraduate teaching.¹ Both these areas of expertise make me particularly qualified to help the inquiry with its deliberations.
3. The murders at Bondi were criminal atrocities. The members of the committee owe it to the victims and their families to objectively and correctly identify the factors responsible for them. There is no benefit to the NSW community from scapegoating, misrepresentation or the attempt to gain political advantage from a tragedy. This is especially the case when those being blamed are protesters against a genocide in which over 70000 people have been killed, some of them relatives of Palestinians in NSW.

‘Globalise the intifada’: rarely used, and certainly not a call to violence

4. The concentration on the phrase ‘globalise the intifada’ is entirely misplaced, for two reasons: (a) it has not been widely used in NSW, and, (b) even if it had been, it could not be reasonably taken to constitute incitement to violence. I expand on each point in what follows.
5. ‘Globalise the intifada’ has rarely been heard at demonstrations in Sydney. The proposal is therefore to legislate against a slogan which has hardly been used, and which as a result could not have played any major causal role in the lead-up to Bondi.

¹ See: ‘Disciplinary and the Boycott,’ in *Enforcing Silence: Academic Freedom, Palestine and the Criticism of Israel*, eds. David Landy, Ronit Lentin and Conor McCarthy (London: Zed Books, 2020), 67–90; *Boycott Theory and the struggle for Palestine. Universities, Intellectualism and Liberation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2023); ‘Palestine Solidarity and Zionist Backlash in Australian Universities,’ *Middle East Critique* 33: 435-448 (coauthored with Jumana Bayeh); ‘Australian Universities in the Gaza Genocide: Managerial Capitulation, Staff and Student Resistance,’ in Walaa Alqaisiya, Nicola Perugini (eds), *Palestine and the Western Academe. Fighting the Exception, Defending Epistemic Justice*. London: Routledge, 2026.

6. Even if the slogan had been regularly used, it would still not be reasonable to conclude that it is ‘so inherently hateful by [its] nature that [it] lead[s] to incitement of hatred and threaten[s] community safety’, as the inquiry’s terms of reference suggest.

No expression ‘inherently’ has a particular effect, as the terms of reference claim

7. The proposition that ‘globalise the intifada’ *inherently* constitutes hate-speech or incitement rests on a basic error about the nature of language and meaning that the inquiry should avoid making. There are *no* phrases in *any* language that *inherently* – i.e. necessarily – possess any particular quality or *inherently* lead to any particular contextual effect.
8. As is standardly accepted (and as is also commonsensical) the meaning and effect of an expression is more than a matter of the words that the expression contains. The meaning that an expression has in use is a *joint* function of the literal meaning of the words involved, *and* the context in which the phrase is uttered. In linguistics, this difference is reflected in the standard contrast between ‘literal meaning’ or ‘sentence meaning’ (the accepted, conventional meanings of the words used) and ‘utterance meaning’ or ‘speaker meaning’ (the contextual meaning of the utterance on a particular occasion of use).
9. In order to properly interpret the meaning of any expression, including ‘globalise the intifada’, it is important to recognise that literal meaning and utterance meaning often diverge. This is most obvious when words are used metaphorically, loosely, ironically, or in any of the other many non-literal ways in which they can be spoken or written. When environment protesters use the slogan ‘Kill coal’, the utterance meaning completely overrides the literal sentence meaning: coal is not a living being that can be ‘killed’, so the phrase necessarily takes on the non-literal interpretation of ‘end coal mining’. No one hearing this slogan could reasonably conclude that it is inciting anyone to violence. These kinds of interactions between sentence and utterance meaning are everywhere. As I will demonstrate below, the literal meaning of the phrase ‘globalise the intifada’ cannot be interpreted as inherently constituting incitement to violence. But *even if it could*, this would not mean this possible literal meaning was contextually present every time it was used, since literal meaning is frequently altered by contextual factors.
10. In order to identify a phrase like ‘globalise the intifada’ or any other as *inherently* incitement or hate-speech, it would be necessary to show *both* that its literal or sentence meaning *necessarily* constituted incitement/hate-speech, *and* that this meaning was never overridden by the phrase’s contextual (or ‘utterance’) *meaning*. As will become clear in the following paragraphs, it is impossible to demonstrate either of these things. As a result, there is no reasonable argument that ‘globalise the intifada’ constitutes hate speech that poses a threat to community safety, harmony or cohesion.
11. What would it mean for ‘globalise the intifada’ to *inherently* constitute incitement of hatred and *inherently* threaten community safety, as the committee is being asked to consider? If ‘globalise the intifada’ inherently has these meanings, then this must mean that it has them *on every occasion that it is expressed*. Otherwise, the meaning is not inherent, but context-dependent. But, if ‘globalise the intifada’ *inherently* counts

as incitement, then that must also be the case *in this very sentence*. This is clearly absurd. When I mention the phrase ‘globalise the intifada’ in this submission in order to discuss its possible status as hate speech, I am obviously not inciting anyone to anything, or expressing hate towards anyone.

12. This point is so obvious that it seems ridiculous to even mention. It is, however, essential, and should be enough to debunk the idea that ‘globalise the intifada’ *inherently* or *necessarily* constitutes hate speech. It doesn’t constitute hate speech in the context of this submission and it won’t when members of the inquiry utter it themselves in their deliberations. This existence of an inquiry that will frequently mention the phrase ‘globalise the intifada’ is not a threat to community safety. This proves that what the expression means is a contextual matter and that no accurate assessment of its meaning can be made without considering context.

The use of ‘intifada’ in the context of anti-genocide demonstrations

13. As a result, the committee should consider the question of the context in which ‘globalise the intifada’ is likely to be used in NSW. As I have noted, the slogan has not often been heard in demonstrations in Sydney. The term ‘intifada’, however, has regularly been used at demonstrations, usually in the context of the chant ‘Israel out of West Bank, Israel out of Gaza. Israel out of Palestine, long live the intifada’. I will address the meaning and origin of the term *intifada* below. First, however, if the assumed context for ‘globalise the intifada’ is Palestine demonstrations in NSW, especially, Sydney, then it is necessary to consider the character of these demonstrations in order to assess how they are likely to affect the contextual meaning of the expression.
14. It is essential to do this empirically and objectively. The tens (and in one case hundreds) of thousands of participants in the demonstrations should not be stigmatized and slandered on the basis of prejudice, moral panic or fabrications. To the best of my knowledge, no hate speech prosecutions have been brought as a result of anti-genocide demonstrations. This in itself should count as evidence that the protests have not constituted incitement.
15. The obvious way to see what the protests have been like and what the protesters want is to look at the demands they put and the *other* slogans used at them, and at protesters’ and protest leaders’ statements about what the protests are about. These will supply the best evidence about protesters’ overall beliefs and intentions, and, as a result, about the likely interpretation of any slogans whose meaning is in doubt.
16. In Sydney, Palestine demonstrations have been held with the principal demands ‘Stop the war on Gaza. Free Palestine’ or, on August 3 last year, ‘March for humanity. Save Gaza’. These have been the slogans on banners at the head of the marches. Speakers at the protests have continually assert the wish for peace, justice and equality for *everyone* in historic Palestine, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or background: Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists. Slogans involving the word ‘intifada’ are used by the same demonstrators holding humanitarian placards calling for peace and justice. Interpreting people who use the word ‘intifada’ as wishing violence on anyone is completely inconsistent with the rest of the protesters’ message.

17. Humanitarian slogans seen at the protests in Sydney include the following:

- ‘Palestinian lives matter’
- ‘Ceasefire now!’
- ‘Stop killing kids’
- ‘Healthcare not warfare’
- ‘Stop supporting genocide in Gaza. Nothing justifies genocide’
- ‘Stop Arming Israel’
- ‘Boycott Apartheid Israel. Free Palestine’
- ‘Feed Gaza Now’
- ‘This is not ok. Sanctions now!’
- ‘I nurse my son. Gaza’s mothers bury theirs’
- ‘All children matter’
- ‘Israel has created more child amputees in Gaza than in world history’
- ‘I support Palestine because I believe in basic human rights’
- ‘Do you support violent dispossession of me and my family?’
- ‘It’s not about religion, it’s about humanity’
- ‘No one is free when others are oppressed’.

18. These slogans represent the *overwhelming* tenor of the protests. This is the context in which the term ‘intifada’ should be understood.

The literal meaning of ‘intifada’

19. There are, then, no grounds on which to attribute a contextual (or utterance) meaning to ‘intifada’ that could identify it as hate speech. But what about its literal meaning? The strict literal meaning of *intifada* is ‘uprising’ or ‘shaking off’ (its meanings in Arabic). If ‘intifada’ counts as incitement to violence, then ‘uprising’, ‘revolution’ and a host of other terms do too. If the committee was consistent it would recommend banning them too. This would be a grave infringement on elementary speech rights in a democracy.
20. Historically, in different contexts, *intifada* has been used in relation to many different kinds of political and other activity. Like the term *uprising*, it is highly general, in that it can refer to a wide array of very different things, including participation in protests and marches, children throwing rocks at tanks, armed uprisings, civil disobedience, non-violent direct action, and so.
21. The principle that any word with a general meaning which *might* be *open* to interpretation as incitement should be banned would entail banning vast numbers of political slogans. The ‘Cancel Russia’ slogan sometimes used to protest against the war in Ukraine *could* be construed as incitement of violence against Russian citizens in NSW. The environmental slogan ‘Kill pollution, or it will kill you’ *could* be interpreted as incitement against miners. Both those interpretations are far-fetched. Neither corresponds to the most likely intention of protesters. The interpretation of ‘globalise the intifada’ as incitement is just as far fetched and just as remote from protesters’ intentions.

How protesters themselves have described the meaning of ‘intifada’

22. Returning to the meaning of ‘intifada’ in context, another way of determining the intended meaning of an expression is to ask the people using it what they mean by it. As representatives of the Palestine solidarity movement have repeatedly publicly explained, the term is used to refer to *political* or *cultural opposition*, in solidarity with the people of Palestine, to Israel’s occupation of historic Palestine and the system of apartheid it maintains within its own borders and in the occupied territories.
23. I can illustrate this from my own experience. I have very regularly attended, and sometimes spoken at, the Sydney Palestine demonstrations organised by the Palestine Action Group. At a demonstration in May last year at which I was a speaker, I said in relation to the phrases *intifada* and *from the river to the sea*:

“As we have said time and time again, those words express our movement’s aspirations for peace and equality for everyone, regardless of background or religion. Yet Zionists have the effrontery to tell us that, actually, we mean something different. How dare they tell us what we mean?”
24. These aspirations have often been articulated by speakers at the demonstrations, including the numerous Jewish ones. When Jewish and other protesters chant ‘long live the intifada’, this slogan is not ‘directed’ at a certain community (Jews), as the inquiry’s terms of reference suggest: it is a general, universal call on society to support Palestinians in their quest for justice.
25. It is important in determining the contextual, utterance meaning of ‘globalise the intifada’ that we are being asked to consider it and other slogans in the context of demonstrations. Demonstrations are non-violent, *political* means of supporting particular points of view. People attend demonstrations in order to ‘demonstrate’ their political beliefs to others, in the hope that this will lead to political change.
26. This means that demonstrations are the opposite of direct action and, even more, of terrorism. If protesters intended ‘intifada’ to refer to a violent uprising in NSW against Jewish people, it would be ridiculous to regularly call for this week after week in a demonstration, and then to go home and do nothing. If protesters really shared the abhorrent aspiration for a violent uprising against Jews to occur globally, this would require far more than coming to Sunday demonstrations. The fact that protesters’ activity was limited to protesting is clear evidence that they did not aspire to any violent uprising against Jews in NSW or, indeed, anywhere else.

Conclusion: NSW must not go down the dark road of censorship

27. Attributing responsibility for the ISIS-inspired terror attack to peace protesters and their slogans is irrational and counterproductive. It is striking that the main criticisms of the Palestine protests come from people who would not attend them on principle, and who therefore have no direct experience of them. The premier and others should not be free to blame peace protesters without evidence. No one who actually has attended the Palestine demonstrations regularly can believe that the vast numbers of people who have marched for an end to the genocide since October 7, 2023, including across the harbour bridge in August, support terrorism or approve of the horrifying

attack at Bondi, any more than they approve of the sickening annihilation inflicted on human lives in Gaza.

28. Public policy should be made objectively, dispassionately and with appropriate deliberation. The inquiry's extremely brief timeframe is not conducive to these outcomes. 'Globalise the intifada' and other slogans should not be banned at all; still less should they be banned as the result of a hastily conceived and conducted legislative process. There is already ample legal means of responding to hate speech and incitement through existing legislation.
29. Finally, since anyone who supports Palestine is automatically slurred as an antisemite, I would like to put on record, for the inquiry's benefit, the fact that many members of my late father's extended family were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust. Neither he nor his parents identified as Jewish, but they were counted as such under Nazi race laws. My grandfather was interned during WWII in a Nazi labour camp, from which he escaped. My father and his mother spent the same period in hiding under assumed names in a Budapest cellar and were lucky not to be captured.
30. I was raised Catholic, and do not identify as of any religion, but the accusation that I and my fellow protesters are actually virulent antisemites is one that, given my family's history, I find deeply insulting, presumptuous and ignorant and which I reject categorically. When members of my own family were murdered out of hatred of Jews, I will not be told by anyone that my own advocacy for justice and peace is motivated by antisemitism.
31. I urge the inquiry not to recommend even further demonisation of protesters calling for an end to genocide, and not to take NSW any further down the dark road of censorship and authoritarianism.