

Pearls and Irritations

Document tendered by

Dr Peter Slezak

Received by

Courtney Jade Goodman

Resolved to publish Yes / No

16/6/2025

Peter Slezak

No longer possible to defend the slaughter of over 40,000 civilians as 'Israel's right to self-defence'

December 21, 2024

I know what antisemitism looks like and it is to desecrate the memory of my parents and the victims of real antisemitism when it is weaponised to silence justified criticism of Israel's crimes.

Rally Speech in Hyde Park, Saturday December 15, 2024

I'm proud to stand with you again today together with many Jews around the world who have a conscience and stand in solidarity with Palestine.

Finally, the Australian government changed its long disgraceful voting record at the UN by voting in favour of a resolution calling on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza as soon as possible. The Zionist Israel Lobby are pissed off and having a meltdown because FM Penny Wong finally, belatedly, said Israel needs to comply with international law. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry president Daniel Aghion said the resolution was one of the "most immoral" passed by the UN in decades. And predictably, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu – that convicted war criminal – says "Anti-Israel sentiment is antisemitism." But one Jew online replied:

"Don't carry out genocide in the name of the Jewish people and maybe Jewish people will face less blowback? Thanks for endangering us all you genocidal maniac."

Every day, for over a year now, we see heart-breaking pictures from Gaza, live-streamed atrocities on our mobile phones. Our politicians and our mainstream media have stood by and allowed this to happen.

My mother was a survivor of the Nazi extermination camp in Auschwitz, and she always asked how the world could stand by and allow that to happen. Well, today we know the answer: Our politicians and media have stood by while, as UNICEF says, Gaza "has become a graveyard for children." A report published this week revealed that nearly all the children in Gaza believe that their death is imminent and nearly half of them want to die.

With so much harrowing footage online – and the sheer scale of devastation – it is no longer possible to defend the slaughter of over 40,000 civilians as "Israel's right to self-defence." So instead, there is a campaign to distract us from the obscenities of the ongoing genocide in Gaza – and the increasing brutalities in the West Bank. The tactic has been the resort to a hysterical campaign to combat the supposedly growing threat of antisemitism since October 7 last year, including "reports" of Jewish students afraid to attend their classes.

Prime Minister Albanese has not commented on Israel's bombing of refugee tents, food lines, hospitals, mosques or universities, but now he has appointed a "special envoy" to combat anti-Semitism. This is to fall in to an old, pernicious tactic of Zionists: Fifty years ago, the distinguished Israel diplomat Abba Eban wrote that

"One of the chief tasks of any dialogue with the ... [non-Jewish] world is to prove that ... Anti-Zionism is merely the new anti-Semitism."

In 2020 the Israeli magazine +972 had an article on "False Charges of antisemitism". It said:

"The knee-jerk invocation of antisemitism is meant to do one thing: silence people ..."

In the UK it was revealed that top Party officials had plotted to destroy Jeremy Corbyn by "weaponising" antisemitism. One Israeli parliamentarian, the late Shulamit Aloni, said in an interview "It's a trick we always use".

So, here for example, Alon Cassuto, CEO of the Zionist Federation of Australia said "Graffiti in Woollahra declaring 'Kill Israel' is a thinly veiled call to 'Kill Jews' everywhere." That's BULLSHIT. I'm a university academic and I specialise in linguistics and the philosophy of language; I care about the precise technical use of words, so I say FUCK ISRAEL and FUCK ZIONISM. And as we chant, "Israel out of West Bank, Israel out of Gaza, Israel out of Palestine, long live the INTIFADA!" That's not antisemitic!!

Professor Amanda Wise of Macquarie University has put it well:

"Enough with the disproportionate pearl clutching about anti-Israel graffiti in a wealthy part of Sydney. The media MUST STOP conflating antisemitism with anti-Israel sentiment. Yes, the graffiti attack and the burnt stolen car was stupid and a criminal offence, but it was not an act of antisemitism. ... The real crime is this: Israel's ongoing war against children, the genocide of an entire people. THAT is something we have a right to protest."

Australia's special envoy recently appointed to combat anti-Semitism, Jillian Segal, was asked to define antisemitism. She said she uses the so-called IHRA working definition of antisemitism. In fact, this definition has become an international scandal and has been criticised and rejected by the world's foremost experts on antisemitism and even by its author. The reason is that out of 11 examples of antisemitism, more than half are examples of criticising Israel.

For example: It's supposed to be antisemitic to claim the state of Israel is a racist endeavour. Well, Israel's own Non-Government Organisation ADALAH based in Haifa lists 50 laws in Israel that officially discriminate against Palestinians who are citizens of Israel. And on 19 July 2018 Israel enacted the Basic NATION STATE LAW according to which: "The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people." In other words, Israel is a racist endeavour. In fact, from the earliest beginnings Zionism has been an ideology based on ethnic supremacy, ethnic cleansing and land theft. According to the recent reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israel's own B'Tselem Israel is an Apartheid regime of Jewish supremacy. And that's true of '48 Palestine or "Israel proper" because the illegally occupied West Bank is much worse than Apartheid; it is a brutal military occupation.

Colin Rubenstein of the Australia Israel Jewish Affairs Committee – AIJAC – said "Most Australian Jews feel great angst that Jewish students and staff feel unsafe on university campuses". It's bullshit: there were Jewish students, staff and speakers prominently at the student encampments. But envoy Jillian Segal said universities are a "cauldron of systematic anti-Semitism" Well, let's see: Among the examples she gives, one student said:

"... every day I had to walk past big signs saying "Israel is genocidal", right? And that's pretty upsetting ..."

Another one said:

"I saw ... a staff member, wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh"

Another one said;

" I've been to campus, there's been posters, graffiti, boycott Israel stickers...."

Pretty scary stuff.

And referring to our rallies, Segal says:

"[holding protest] every single week becomes intimidatory in the city ..."something more sinister" ... it's morphed into attacking the Jewish community"

She says:

"Every single week in Sydney and Melbourne we see these demonstrations and marches ... anti-Israel is really anti-Jewish ... because they just want Israel to disappear ..."

We all know that this is just deceitful, delusional slander. And she called for an end to pro-Palestinian demonstrations taking over cities, saying they could be held elsewhere, presumably where they can't upset the very people to whom they are directed. This is a revealing authoritarian response, to stifle free speech and dissent. As Noam Chomsky said, if you don't believe in permitting free speech for the views you detest, then you don't believe in free speech. Of course, this is the famous conception of the philosopher John Stuart Mill writing on the importance of free speech: He said that even the most intolerant Church hears the worst that can be said from the Devil's Advocate before canonising a saint.

Prime Minister Albanese said holding demonstrations outside places of worship such as a synagogue creates division and is a provocative act. But places of worship deserve to lose this protection when they hold political events in support of Israel, featuring soldiers returned from participating in a genocide. Perhaps such events are provocative and create division.

I know what antisemitism looks like and it is to desecrate the memory of my parents and the victims of real antisemitism when it is weaponised to silence justified criticism of Israel's crimes. I have been to every Gaza rally for over a year and there is NEVER any antisemitism at all. And so I give a special shout-out to the Jews Against the Occupation who are here every week with their banner. Our presence and our solidarity refute the smear that these are antisemitic Jew-hate rallies.

Palestinians are traumatised, grieving about the immense horrors committed against them ... and they are expected to worry about the delicate feelings of Jews who are upset by hearing a slogan or seeing a keffiyeh. When we see Palestinian parents in Gaza collect the remains of their children in a plastic shopping bag, Zionists have the indecency to complain that Palestinian protests make them feel "unsafe". The brilliant Palestinian scholar at Macquarie University, Randa Abdel Fattah, put it eloquently: She says "the feelings and fragility of Zionists are used as a rhetorical shield to deflect from engaging with the moral and material reality of genocide". She asks:

"How can any individual support an apartheid settler colonial state carpet bomb, ... starve ... a population of over 2 million people, murder over 40,000 people..., and still make it about your sense of safety ... ?"

"Since when do the victims of genocide have the responsibility to defer to and protect the feelings of those who enact, support, and enable their genocide?"

We are facing one of the great moral tests of our time. In 1967 during the Vietnam War, American scholar Noam Chomsky said something relevant today given the sheer quantity of devastation and quantity of bombing:

"With no further information than this, a person who has not lost his senses must realise that the war is an overwhelming atrocity."

The assault on Gaza is not a "war" but a cowardly act of terrorism by the most sophisticated military force against a defenceless population. It's important to recognise that the excessive, disproportionate military force against civilians – mass murder – is deliberate – it is official Israeli military policy. It's actually called the DAHIYA DOCTRINE – GOOGLE IT!!

According to the president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, Jeremy Liebler, according to a recent survey by Monash University, "the overwhelming majority of Australian Jews are Zionists, and in particular support Israel and the IDF since October 7. It follows, therefore, that Jews bear a responsibility for what is being done in their name. "Silence is complicity" But even worse, COMPLICITY is complicity. After the Holocaust, Jews have the slogan "never again" but this doesn't mean never again just to Jews, it must mean never again to anyone. Today and since 1948 in Palestine, Jews are not the victims, but we are the perpetrators

So, I agree with Randa when she says "Jews SHOULD feel uncomfortable. It is our DUTY to make them uncomfortable." Speaking to Jews Randa has said eloquently and powerfully:

"A genocide is taking place in Gaza in the name of Zionism, the state of Israel and in the name of Jewish people."

"Your existential crises, narcissistic feelings and deliberate conflation of Jewish identity with Zionism have become our children's graveyards."

"For Palestinians, Zionism is a genocidal slaughterhouse. A child killing, amputating, burning, bombing, raping, torturing, land thieving and destroying machine."

"We have the right to demand an end to settler colonialism, apartheid and occupation without factoring in how our oppressors "feel"."

"We have the right to imagine that another world is possible. We have the right to refuse to be held hostage to confected feelings by people who support our annihilation."

Finally, as on earlier occasions, it's important for me to say something about the chant we always use at rallies around the world, our slogan, "From the River to the Sea ..."

The slogan was condemned by Prime Minister Albanese slogan as “very violent” and having no place in Australia when it was repeated by the wonderful Senator Fatima Payman in Parliament. Jewish and other apologists for Israel’s crimes want to defame and smear us by arguing that the chant calls for the destruction of Israel. But in the context when Israel has officially declared that there will be no Palestinian state “from the River to the Sea,” it should be obvious that the slogan is a plea for liberation and justice. The point has been made by US Palestinian Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib who also said “a call for freedom, human rights and peaceful coexistence” is not a call for death, destruction or hate.”

My Palestinian colleague Dr Lana Tatour has pointed out: “they ought to listen to Palestinians who have been articulating liberation as an inclusive project of equal rights for all.” She says, this liberation means “equality for all the inhabitants of the land—and the dismantling of the settler colonialism and the apartheid regime that exist now.” This is “The demand for ... the right of Palestinians to live in dignity and equality in their homeland.”

We must have a shared vision for the future of all the people of the region, Israelis and Palestinians alike. Among Palestinians who are articulating liberation as an inclusive project is Nasser Mashni, President of APAN (Australia Palestine Advocacy Network) who said, if you have a problem with freedom and justice for everyone, the problem is not the chant, it is you.

So, with the recent ruling of the ICJ we must demand an immediate, unconditional and permanent end to the Israeli occupation and assault on Gaza. And we must bring the war criminals and their accomplices like Albanese and Wong to account in the International Criminal Court. We owe it to the memory of the victims. And we owe it to the prospects of a just peace for all the peoples in historic Palestine.

That’s what we mean when we say, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free.”