50,000+ Petition Delivered to Facebook. "Not to Include 'Zionist' in Is Hate Speech Policy"

"'Zionist' should not be part of Facebook's hate-speech policy – and the Israeli government does not get to dictate what we can and cannot say"

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From Menlo Park to Dublin, Johannesburg to Tel Aviv-Yaffo, activists in 17 cities across the globe delivered petitions with over 54,000 signatures to Facebook corporate offices today. The petitions call on the social media giant to not include "Zionist" in its hate speech policy, as Facebook is currently considering. The COVID-safe petition delivery in New York City was live-streamed on Facebook, during a virtual petition delivery event.

Signed by leading human rights activists, academics and artists, the petition calls on Facebook to ensure that any amendments to its hate speech policy keep all people safe – and connected.

The global campaign "Facebook, we need to talk," co-sponsored by 55 organizations, began in response to an inquiry by Facebook to assess if critical conversations that use the term "Zionist" fall within the rubric of hate speech as per Facebook's Community Standards. Zionism is a political ideology and movement that emerged in the 19th century and led to the founding of the state of Israel on Palestinian land; It has been deeply contested since its conception, including within the Jewish community.

The petitions were delivered in-person to Facebook's US headquarters in the San Francisco Bay Area, and to their European HQ in Dublin, Ireland. Petitions were also delivered in-person to Facebook offices in: Amsterdam, Berlin, Boston, Brussels, Denver, Johannesburg, London, Los Lunas, New York City, Paris, Seattle, Sydney, Tel Aviv, Toronto, and Vancouver. In Dublin, the petition delivery also included a letter of support signed by over fifty Members of the Irish Parliament, delivered by MP Gino Kenny TD, Vice-Chair of Parliamentary Friends of Palestine.

The virtual petition delivery included live-streamed deliveries, phone and fax actions, and speeches and performances by Noura Erekat, Judith Butler, Remi Kanazi, Le Trio Joubran and Gabrielle Spears.

Judith Butler said: *"As Jews, we have the choice to not be Zionist, which is the only possible just position... We refuse the argument that only Zionists are Jews – and Facebook*

should not claim that our criticism of Zionism is antisemitic."

Noura Erakat said: *"As Palestinians, we cannot under-estimate the impact of social media in enabling us to be seen and to actually tell our story. But when I tried to share the story of how my cousin was killed by Israeli soldiers, Facebook took it down. This is why we have to fight."*

Voices from petition deliveries around the world:

BRUSSELS, Dr. Anya Topolski, Another Jewish Voice: *"We're here today at five Facebook offices across Europe saying loud and clear: Facebook should refuse to cooperate with those who are destroying solidarity between Jews and Palestinians. Instead, Facebook should help us to connect across differences so that, together, we can dismantle all forms of racism, which includes both antisemitism and Islamophobia, as well as all forms of bigotry used to keep us apart."*

DUBLIN, Fatin Al Tamimi, Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign: *"We must stand together against antisemitism! But instead, Facebook may end up preventing Palestinians from naming the ideology of the state that has colonized and oppressed us for more than seventy years. Here in Dublin, at Facebook's European headquarters, human rights campaigners are demanding that Facebook ensure that we, indigenous Palestinians and our global allies, will not be prevented from holding the Israeli government accountable for its human rights violations."*

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, Eve Hershcopf, JVP-Bay Area: *"As the home of the Free Speech movement and of Facebook's international headquarters, Bay Area organizations have a particular responsibility to speak up against Facebook's efforts to suppress speech critical of Zionist ideology and Israel's actions against Palestinians."*

SYDNEY, Vivienne Porzsolt, Jews against the Occupation: *"Here in Sydney, we join the global action to oppose Facebook's support of the efforts of the Israeli government to silence opposition to the actions of the state of Israel. Labeling it 'antisemitic' is fundamentally dishonest. Facebook certainly shouldn't undertake political censorship at the request of the Israeli government."*

TEL AVIV-YAFFO, Michal Sapir, human rights activist: *"Today, along with a group of Israeli activists in Tel Aviv, I'm asking Facebook to help us hold all governments, including the Israeli government, accountable. I'm asking Facebook not to censor Palestinian and other voices from telling our stories and criticizing the state."*

Notable human rights activists and cultural figures such as **Hanan Ashrawi**, **Norita Cortiñas**, **Wallace Shawn, Alia Shawkat** and **Peter Gabriel** have signed the petition, which garnered over 50,000 signatures in a month. The open letter notes that if Facebook restricts the usage of the word "Zionist," it would prevent Palestinians from talking about their daily lives, shield the Israeli government from accountability for human rights violations, and do nothing to make Jewish people safer from antisemitism.

This attempt to [stifle conversations](#) about Zionist political ideology and Zionist policies — both of which have [real implications for Palestinian and Israeli people](#), as well as Jewish and Palestinian people around the world — is part of an [emerging pattern of political censorship by the Israeli government](#) and [some of its supporters](#). The most [prominent example of these](#)

efforts to shield the Israeli government from accountability is the current campaign to impose the controversial IHRA working definition of antisemitism on campuses and civil society, and to codify it in government legislation. The IHRA definition conflates antisemitism with holding the Israeli government accountable for rights violations, stifling protected political speech that is necessary for healthy, open discussions about foreign policy and human rights.

The campaign was launched by 7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, Palestine Legal, MPower Change, Jewish Voice for Peace, Independent Jewish Voices Canada, Eyewitness Palestine, BDS National Committee, American Muslims for Palestine and Adalah Justice Project. *(See below for a complete list of 55 co-sponsors.)*

Rabbi Alissa Wise, Deputy Director of Jewish Voice for Peace: *"Across five continents, Facebook users brought a simple and urgent message to Facebook: A move to equate "Zionist" and "Jew" in your hate speech policies would harm Palestinians and Jews. In 17 cities, we brought the over 50,000 names of those across the globe who are urging Facebook to not accede to the Israeli government's demand to shield them from accountability, and undermine our shared commitment to dismantle antisemitism."*

Linda Sarsour, Executive Director, MPower Change: *"Over 52,000 people from varying faith and cultural backgrounds across the globe have come together to urge Facebook: don't make a special exception limiting the speech of Palestinians and their allies. Facebook won't crackdown on white supremacist groups using their platform to push antisemitic, anti-Black, and Islamophobic rhetoric — so they are targeting a marginalized people living under apartheid instead. I wish this pattern weren't all too familiar to me as a Palestinian-American woman and committed activist. Let's make sure they don't set this dangerous precedent."*

Nadim Nashif, Executive Director of 7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media: *"Having 50,000 signatures delivered to Facebook offices in more than a dozen cities around the world shows that there is public support for the freedom of expression of Palestinians online. 'Zionist' should not be part of Facebook's hate-speech policy – and the Israeli government does not get to dictate what we can and cannot say."*

To read the full text of the open letter, list of signatories, and background about the campaign, visit facebookweneedtotalk.org. **For interviews with the campaign organizers and activists who delivered the petitions**, contact Sonya E. Meyerson-Knox at sonya@jvp.org or 929-290-0317. **Footage of the petition deliveries is available upon request.**

Campaign background

We all want to connect. And social media can be a powerful tool to help us get past walls and share our stories, grow our networks and stand up for one another. But some politicians and governments are trying to turn these necessary guardrails into walls that keep us apart, generating fear and keeping us divided so they can avoid being held accountable for their actions.

Right now, Facebook is reaching out to stakeholders to ask if critical conversations that use the term "Zionist" fall within the rubric of hate speech as per Facebook's Community Standards. Basically, Facebook is assessing if "Zionist" is being used as a proxy for "Jewish

people or Israelis" in attacks on its platform.

Launched just a month ago, an [open letter](#) calling on Facebook to not include "Zionist" in its hate speech policy already has over 50,000 signatures. The petition reads: "We are deeply concerned about Facebook's proposed revision of its hate speech policy to consider "Zionist" as a proxy for 'Jew' or 'Jewish'." "The proposed policy would too easily mischaracterize conversations about Zionists — and by extension, Zionism — as inherently antisemitic, harming Facebook users and undermining efforts to dismantle real antisemitism and all forms of racism, extremism and oppression."

After 12 hours the petition already had thousands of signers, including: Alia Shawkat, Atilio Boron, Judith Butler, Michael Chabon, Noam Chomsky, Julie Christie, Richard Falk, Amos Goldberg, Marc Lamont Hill, Adnan Jubran, Ronnie Kasrils, Elias Khoury, Karol Cariola, Ken Loach, Miriam Margloyses, Ilan Pappe, Vijay Prashad, Prabir Purkayastha, Rima Berns-McGown, Jessica Tauane, Einat Weizman and Cornel West. (*See [facebookweneedtotalk.org/petition-text/english](#) for a complete list of initial signatories.*)

This move is part of a concerning pattern of the [Israeli government](#) and its supporters pressuring [Facebook and other social media platforms to expand their hate speech policies to include speech critical of Israel and Zionism](#) – and [falsely claiming this would help fight antisemitism.](#) They are hoping that by mischaracterizing critical use of the term "Zionists" as anti-Jewish, they can avoid accountability for its policies and actions that violate Palestinian human rights. Such a move would [do nothing to address antisemitism](#), especially the [violent antisemitism of right-wing movements](#) and states — which, as recent events have shown, is the [source](#) of the most tangible threats to Jewish lives.

Attempts to stifle conversations about Zionist political ideology and Zionist policies carried out by state actors — both of which have [real implications for Palestinian and Israeli people](#), as well as Jewish and Palestinian people around the world — are part of an [emerging pattern of political censorship by the Israeli government](#) and [some of its supporters](#).

The most [prominent example of these efforts to shield the Israeli government from accountability](#) is the current campaign to impose the controversial IHRA working definition of antisemitism on campuses and civil society, and to [codify it in government legislation](#).

If Facebook does move to restrict use of the word Zionist, this would block important conversations on the world's largest social media platform, harm Facebook users attempting to connect across space and difference, and [deprive Palestinians of a critical venue for expressing their political viewpoints](#) to the world. [Palestinians need to be able to talk about Zionism and Zionists in order to share their family stories and daily lived experience with the world](#). That language is essential to clearly distinguishing between Judaism and Jewish people, on the one hand, and the State actors responsible for human rights violations against Palestinians, on the other.

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Facebook, we need to talk campaign co-sponsors:

- 7amleh: The Arab Center for Advancement of Social Media
- Action Center on Race & the Economy (ACRE)
- Adalah Justice Project
- American Friends Service Committee

- American Muslims for Palestine
- Association France-Palestine Solidarité
- BDS Berlin
- BDS France
- BDS México
- BDS Movement, International
- AROC (Arab Resource & Organizing Center)
- CAIR
- California Scholars for Academic Freedom
- Center for Constitutional Rights
- Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)
- Codepink
- Color of Change
- Defending Rights and Dissent
- Disciples Palestine Israel Network
- docP Netherlands
- European Legal Support Center
- EyeWitness Palestine
- Falistiniyat
- Fight for the Future
- Foundational for Middle East Peace
- France-Palestine Solidarité Association
- Free Press
- Free Speech on Israel
- Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)
- Independent Jewish Voices Canada
- If Not Now
- Jewish Voice for Labour
- Jewish Voice for Peace
- Jews Against the Occupation Sydney
- Kairos
- Los Otros Judíos
- Massachusetts Peace Action
- MediaJustice
- Mijente
- Movement Alliance Project
- MPower Change
- National Lawyers Guild
- National Students for Justice in Palestine
- Palestine Legal
- Palestine Solidarity Campaign (UK)
- Palestinian Youth Movement
- Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism (QUIT!)
- Rabet
- Rethinking Foreign Policy
- Sada Social
- South African BDS Coalition
- Therapists for Peace and Justice
- Tree of Life Educational Fund
- US Campaign for Palestinian Rights

- US Palestinian Community Network

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