



A JCRC Bay Area Guide to Recognizing Problematic Rhetoric

Many of the chants used at pro-Palestinian rallies as well as the anti-Israel epithets thrown in the faces of Jewish individuals contain harmful subtext that is not always well understood by the general public. We are providing this guidance to help the public better understand how harmful, hateful terminology is used to attack and harass Jews, whether or not they are supporters of Israel.

COMMONLY USED TERMS

“From the river to the Sea, Palestine will be free”

The “river” refers to the Jordan River and the “sea” refers to the Mediterranean Sea. The land between those two bodies of water includes the State of Israel (i.e. the land inside the [“Green Line”](#)), the West Bank, and Gaza. This chant is not talking about ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Instead, they are stating that they want to “free” Israel from Jews and make all of it a Palestinian state instead. To many Jews, this is heard as a call for the destruction of the world’s only Jewish state, and can feel aggressive or threatening.

“Free Palestine”

The most frequent meaning of “Free Palestine” is removal of Jews from the land and destruction of the State of Israel, replacing it with a Palestinian state. Some believe this chant is calling for human rights for Palestinians, or an end to the occupation of the West Bank. However, you will often see pictures of the entire State of Israel, West Bank and Gaza labeled as “Palestine” on signs, T-shirts and in literature. This language is a rejection of the two-state solution. Many Jews find this language violent and threatening, and for those with Israeli family and friends, this may feel all the more aggressive and threatening.

“Intifada, intifada” or “Long live the intifada”

Intifada means “uprising” in Arabic. The last intifada occurred in the early 2000s when Palestinian terrorists attacked Jewish civilians inside of Israel, using suicide bombers in buses, cafes, nightclubs, and other locations. Many Israelis died or were injured. This call to “intifada” evokes those murders and does not represent a call for peaceful or civil protest. Instead, whether intentionally or not, it is an inciting call to violence against Jews. Some protests even have signs calling for a “global intifada,” which implies that American Jews are targets, as well.

“Apartheid Israel” or “Israel is an Apartheid state”

This is an accusation leveled at Israel regarding its policies inside the Green Line and in the West Bank for the purpose of making an analogy between Israel and South Africa and promoting a boycott. Israel may not always live up to its ideals, but it cannot be an “apartheid state” by definition since minorities are part of its democratic system and represented in the Knesset (Israeli parliament). Of course, this doesn’t mean that there isn’t discrimination. The West Bank is a military occupation with partial Palestinian self-rule, and its status is complicated. Many Jews see this label as an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

Further, accusing Israel of “apartheid” or even “occupation” in Gaza is completely nonsensical. Israel withdrew all soldiers and civilians from Gaza in 2005. No Israelis have lived there since then. Hamas, a terrorist organization which also runs a political party, won local elections in 2006. In 2007, it took over full control of Gaza, violently removing the rival Fatah faction (which heads the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank) and setting up an autocratic system in Gaza. The Israeli government has no control over Gaza’s governance whatsoever although it and Egypt have maintained a blockade of Gaza to try to limit weapons from entering the territory since Hamas took over.

“75 years of occupation”

This phrase rejects the legitimacy of Israel as it was established by the United Nations’ Partition Plan in 1947. Referring to the “occupation” as starting 75 years ago is referring to the creation of the State of Israel. Not only is this a factually inaccurate read of history, but when someone calls for an end to the occupation starting in 1948 that is a call for the destruction of Israel.

From 1948-1967, Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt occupied Gaza. Israel only gained control of those territories after a defensive war, the Six Day War, against the surrounding Arab countries in 1967. Those using this language want the entirety of the land that is today Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza to be replaced by a Palestinian state.

“Settler colonialism”

Calling Israel a “settler-colonialist state” (or sometimes a “European-colonialist state”) refers to the idea that Israel “colonized” or “stole” the land, which is false for three main reasons:

1. Jews who settled in what was then part of the Ottoman Empire in the late 1800s and early 1900s purchased land from the land owners. They did not attack or steal the land. Israel was established in 1948 following the United Nations’ partition plan, which defined two states, one Jewish and one Arab. Additional land was gained by Israel in a defensive war after Israel declared independence and was attacked by surrounding Arab countries. Israel gained control over the West Bank and Gaza from Jordan and Egypt, which occupied them after the 1948 war, after it was attacked in the Six Day War. Israel pulled all soldiers and civilians out of Gaza in 2005 and turned the territory over to the Palestinian Authority.

2. Jews were never acting on behalf of a European colonial power. Instead, they were fleeing discrimination from Europe and were part of a nationalist movement called Zionism, which supported self-determination for Jews in their ancestral homeland of Israel – where small communities of Jews have always lived.
3. Over half of the current population of Jewish Israelis were not from Europe but came as refugees from Middle Eastern or North African countries, where their families had lived for centuries.

Note: Sometimes, the statement that “all Israelis are settlers” is heard, meaning that all Jewish Israelis, including those living inside the State of Israel, i.e., not just those living in the West Bank, are considered “settlers.” This essentially denies Israel’s legitimacy and right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state. It also is used to justify terrorism against Israeli civilians by dehumanizing them as “settlers.”

Charges of “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing” in Gaza

[Genocide](#) is an internationally recognized crime where acts are committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Israel’s response to the terrorist attacks by Hamas are aimed at ensuring the safety of the Israeli people by removing Hamas’ ability to launch attacks, which may include removing them from power. Israel’s target is not the Palestinian people. Civilian casualties are a tragic part of war, and are particularly difficult to avoid when weapons and fighters are hidden among civilian populations as is the case in Gaza. The Israeli army routinely warns civilians that it is about to strike an area, in order to avoid harming civilians. Hamas, on the other hand, deliberately targeted Israeli civilians, including children and the elderly, committing murder at point blank range and other atrocities such as rape, torture, and hostage-taking.

The charge of [ethnic cleansing](#) in Gaza is simply false. Israel unilaterally withdrew its citizens and military from Gaza in 2005 and has not made any efforts, actual or stated, to repopulate the region with Israelis. Israel’s response to Hamas’ attacks are not aimed at removing Palestinians from Gaza. They are aimed at ending Hamas’ ability to launch attacks on Israeli citizens of all backgrounds.

Israel’s response is “disproportionate”

Israel has been accused of a disproportionate response to Hamas’s actions. It is unclear what people who level that charge would see as a proportionate response to murder, rape, torture. Over 1,400 people were massacred and over 220 people from Israel, most of them innocent civilians, were kidnapped. Certainly no one would advocate that Israel respond in kind. Like any country that is attacked, Israel has a responsibility to protect its citizens and international visitors to its country. Israel’s goal is to make sure this kind of attack can never happen again.