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Campaign Against Misrepresentation in Public Affairs, Information and the News

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Dear Jonathan

Please reconsider your statements about pro-Palestinian marches

We are writing with concern and dismay about your comments that the pro-Palestine marches may have to be banned in the wake of the Golders Green stabbings.

You have asserted a connection between the marches and the violence against Jews. May we ask directly: what is the evidence for this?

We are not aware of any, and you have not, to our knowledge, produced any such evidence. This matters enormously, because you are recommending the suspension of a fundamental civil liberty based on a causal claim that, as far as we can see, has not been established.

It is a basic tenet of statistical reasoning that correlation does not prove causality. Evidence of a correlation between ice cream sales and incidents of people drowning in the sea does not prove that one is the cause of the other. Other mediating causes (e.g. hot weather and people going swimming) provide a much more likely causal explanation.

And so it is in this instance. Israeli state oppression and violence towards Palestinians, and its attacks on Lebanon and Iran, coupled with the fact that Israeli leaders, Zionist Jews, and many politicians and media commentators have persistently conflated Jews with Israel, provide a much more likely causal link. This includes the Chief Rabbi's public description of the IDF as "our soldiers". The result is a widespread and erroneous belief that all Jews support what Israel is doing at a time when its army and air force are carrying out well-documented war crimes. You have not even considered this explanation.

On the matter of alleged antisemitism, it strikes us, as an organisation dedicated to countering misrepresentation, that the word "antisemitism" is being deliberately applied in an indiscriminate way to phenomena that are categorically different from one another.

These include:

- Traditional antisemitism, defined as hostility towards Jews as Jews (which, can itself be broken down into different types, such as religious antisemitism and racial antisemitism).
- Hostility towards Jews upon the basis of their assumed support for Israel and the IDF.
- Hostility towards Zionism and towards Israel.

- Arson and vandalism attacks on Jewish community buildings, which UK police say were carried out by paid criminals (with no ideological motive) acting as proxies for allegedly Iran-linked networks.
- Acts of violence towards Jews carried out by people with serious mental health problems and a history of violence.

These are five meaningfully different phenomena with significantly different causes. Whose interests are served by obscuring these differences – and the drivers of each – by clustering them all together under the single term “antisemitism”?

You have spoken about the cumulative effect of these marches on the Jewish community and how they might contribute to a sense of insecurity among Jews. This statement is inherently problematic in that it treats “Jews” as a single monolith, which is assumed to be supportive of Israel and ignores the sizable Jewish block and the Haredis at all the national demonstrations.

It also fails to differentiate between different sources of those feelings of insecurity, including:

- Insecurity among Jews who feel threatened by the protests based on the belief that they represent a threat to the safety of Jews in this country.
- Insecurity among Jews who feel threatened by the protests because they challenge the legitimacy of Zionism and Israel – conceived of as a state that privileges Jews above non-Jews.

The responsibility for the first of these types of insecurity lies mainly with the government and media’s response to these protests, and the irresponsible conflation that we have just noted.

Many Zionist Jews would still experience the second type of insecurity even if the marches were being more fairly and accurately reported upon, because anti-Zionist sentiments are indeed expressed during these marches; but what conclusions should we draw from this?

There can be no doubt that many Zionist Jews view Israel as a sacred institution; but Palestinians experience it as a programme of systematic oppression, dispossession and apartheid; and the world’s two leading human rights organisations (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) as well as Israel’s own main human rights organisation (B’Tselem) have attested to this reality, and published detailed reports on how this programme of systematic oppression, dispossession and apartheid operates.

What you appear to be doing here is demonstrating one-sided empathy, and then demanding that the feelings and sensibilities of pro-Zionist Jews should be given privilege over the rights of pro-Palestine demonstrators to demand an end to this ongoing injustice. It should be noted that all human rights movements throughout history have faced objections from those who regard their call for justice as a threat to their cherished institutions and way of life.

It should also be noted that the focus by the government and media on particular chants – chanted by some people, some of the time on these marches – contrasts sharply with their total neglect of the demands of the organisations holding these demonstrations, which are a far more accurate and reliable gauge of what these demonstrations are about. But even granting that these chants are sometimes chanted and may offend some people, what is their real meaning and significance?

The insistence of Keir Starmer and others that chants such as "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free" or "Globalize the Intifada" represent a call to violence towards Jews is based upon a hostile and irresponsible misinterpretation of their intended meaning. Where is the evidence of this? Has he thought to commission any research on this topic before making such inflammatory claims? Should the demonstrators not have the right to say what they actually mean, before being declared guilty of wanting to hurt Jews? And, again, this irresponsible misrepresentation is occurring within the context of a selective focus on particular chants to the neglect of any attention at all to the actual demands of the organisers of the marches or, for that matter, the many expressions of simple compassionate concern for Palestinians at such marches and the harsh reality of occupation and systematic oppression to which they are a response.

Whose interests are really being served by this?

Banning these marches will not reduce hostility towards Jews, and will very likely increase both hostility towards them, with people thinking that they wield illegitimate power and influence and that nearly all of them support Israel and the IDF. Due to biased reporting, most British people are unaware of the large numbers of Jewish people who oppose Israel.

Finally, it is also necessary to address the claims made by Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mark Rowley in interviews with The Times and ITV on 1st May, in which he asserted that the organisers had repeatedly sought to route marches past synagogues. This can only be described as a defamatory and inflammatory lie. He has also asserted, upon the basis of this lie, that the marches feel antisemitic.

This was an outrageous abuse of office and breach of police impartiality that undermines public confidence in the police force. The march organisers have instructed the law firm Hodge Jones & Allen Solicitors LLP to send The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime a formal legal letter laying out their complaint and requesting a formal retraction of these comments. We hope the Police Commissioner will make a full and unreserved retraction and apology for these comments as soon as possible.

We sincerely hope that you will reflect upon the points made above and reconsider the reasoning behind your conclusions. We shall be grateful to hear from you within two weeks.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Coulter, Secretary, on behalf of the CAMPAIGN committee

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Institutional signatories:

International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP)

Jewish Voice for Liberation (JVL)

Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JJP)