“From the river to the sea” is clearly anti-Semitic according to the IHRA definition. The use of the slogan must be discontinued. Media release from the Swiss Federation of Israeli Communities (SIG). Thursday, 18.01.2024



Protesters hold a banner with a popular chant that has caused controversy: “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” © Eleventh Hour Photography Alamy Stock Foto

The slogan “From the river to the sea” is antisemitic according to the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The slogan also contains a call for violence against Jewish people in Israel. The SIG condemns this slogan in the strongest possible terms.

Since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict, the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” has appeared very regularly in various contexts. It is chanted at demonstrations and can be found on banners and signs. It is used on flyers or in appeals as an overarching term of struggle. It is also omnipresent on social media or as spray-painted lettering on the walls of buildings. However, the postulated freedom for a Palestine has a dark underbelly that many do not seem to realize. “From the river to the sea” is not criticism of the Israeli state, but clearly anti-Semitic.

Anti-Semitic slogan according to IHRA definition

This finding is based on the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which is recognized and applied by numerous states and organizations worldwide and to which the SIG also refers in its work. What is decisive here is what the slogan actually insinuates and puts forward as a demand. The “river” and the “sea” referred to are the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. In between lie the state of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. So there can only be a Palestine from the Jordan to the Mediterranean if the state of Israel is wiped out first. This denies the Jewish state the right to exist. This is where the definition that deems this to be anti-Semitic comes into play. In a second step, the consequences of such a dissolution of the state of Israel must be considered in reality. Around seven million Jews live in Israel, whose security is existentially linked to the state of Israel. The slogan is therefore tantamount to a call for violence. On October 7, 2023, the world was shown what such an extermination could look like. Hamas also uses this fighting term in its 2017 charter, in which it also explicitly proclaims the annihilation of Israel.

Demonstrators must show responsibility

This slogan is currently being used to advertise a demonstration in Zurich on January 27, 2024. For the SIG and the entire Jewish community, this display of clearly anti-Semitic slogans and the underlying call for violence are intolerable. In addition, January 27 is the International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust.

“From the river to the sea” is anti-Semitic, but it is still unclear whether it is punishable in Switzerland. Following the various demonstrations in recent months, there have been numerous complaints about the slogan. However, there is still no final verdict on whether “From the river to the sea” legally violates the racism penal code Art. 261bis StGB or constitutes a punishable incitement to violence. For the SIG, however, one thing is clear: whether punishable or not, the slogan incites hatred and fuels the conflict here too. The organizers and participants of the demonstrations must show responsibility here and refrain from using the slogan. © SIG 18.1.2024

*International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), German: Internationale Allianz zum Holocaustgedenken.

This is the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism

The IHRA definition consists of two parts. In the first part, the definition is formulated:

“Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews that can be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Anti-Semitism is directed in word or deed against Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property as well as against Jewish community institutions or religious institutions.”