

LA Jews for Peace Policy Statement

Los Angeles, CA.

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Student Pro-Gaza Protests are Peaceful and Not Anti-Semitic

LA Jews for Peace supports pro-Gaza student protests, now occurring at over 200 colleges and universities across the United States. They consist of students peacefully demanding their university divest from companies that profit from the Israeli genocide on Gaza. Signs and banners at the protests call for a ceasefire to end Israel's genocide on the Palestinian people in Gaza, and to provide humanitarian aid for the over 1 million starving and displaced Palestinian people in Gaza who are living without shelter in rag-tag, tent-city refugee camps.

The core issue of these protests is the student's attempt to stop U.S. government support of the genocide (provide Israel weapons and diplomatic protection), and their university's investment in funding Israel's apartheid system and war on Gaza (weapon companies in their portfolio).

Some mainstream media and Congresspersons suggest that campus protests are a hotbed of anti-Semitism and are a danger to Jewish students. That doesn't fit our observations or published reports from Jewish students on campus¹. **LA Jews for Peace** condemns all anti-Semitic acts, but notes that imputably antisemitic campus incidents are rare, isolated, and wrongfully mischaracterize these protests.

Student protesters are non-violently acting within their rights. The use of force and coercion to stop the protests is unjustified. By calling in local police, universities are criminalizing students for exercising a fundamental academic goal—their freedom of expression.

The phrase, "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free," occurs in a few chants and on a few signs—it needs clarification. That phrase is completely analogous to the phrase, "between the Sea and the Jordan there will be only Israeli sovereignty" which is an assertion in the original charter (1977) of Likud, Prime Minister Netanyahu's political party². The "need" for Israeli control between the River and the Sea was explicitly stated by Netanyahu in January 2024 when he rejected President Biden's suggestion of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Netanyahu promised (in Hebrew, translation by *Haaretz*³) that Israel will take over the entire region it currently occupies "from the river to the sea" and clarified that Israel "must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River," which is basically the same thing⁴.

The phrase, as used by Likud and pro-Gaza protesters, is clearly aspirational. As many commentators have pointed out, the phrase is not a threat to Jews or to the state of Israel. It is not anti-Semitic.

¹ Ben-Menachem, Jonathan, *Zeteo*, April 23, 2024 . <https://zeteo.com/p/i-am-a-jewish-student-at-columbia>

² <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/original-party-platform-of-the-likud-party>

³ *Haaretz*, Jan.21, 2024, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-01-21/ty-article/israel-based-news-outlet-incorrectly-translates-pms-words-leading-to-media-firestorm/0000018d-2bfa-daf5-a1bf-affa764b0000>

⁴ *New Republic*, Jan.18, 2024, <https://newrepublic.com/post/178243/benjamin-netanyahu-literally-says-from-the-river-to-the-sea>; also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V96T8rlkFc>