

US NEWS

# NYC Palestinian restaurant chain facing death threats for 'openly genocidal' menu phrase owner says is 'nowhere near our definition'

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# FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA

## SHRIMP KEBAB

Served over rice with a side of potatoes and salad

23

## SALMON KEBAB

Served over rice with a side of potatoes and salad

26

## WHOLE RED SNAPPER

Served over rice with salad



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A Palestinian restaurant chain in New York City featuring a menu section entitled “From the River to the Sea” is receiving death threats for being “openly genocidal,” but its owner insists the controversial messaging is not a call to eradicate Israel.

Abdul Elenani and Ayat Masoud opened the newest location of their restaurant Ayat earlier this month in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, where menus feature the controversial phrase to label its seafood section as well as a crying Palestinian woman with the words “Down with the occupation.”

“From the river to the sea” is deemed an antisemitic call for the destruction of the Jewish state by the Anti-Defamation League that has been chanted by protesters worldwide since Israel waged war on Hamas in the disputed Gaza Strip following the terror group’s

Oct. 7 terror attack that killed some 1,200 people.

“That slogan has been on my menu for the past year, way before Oct. 7, and that slogan within our communities has always been defined as a calling for peace and equality for Palestinian people in their country,” Elenani told The Post Thursday.

“And after Oct. 7, it was interpreted to be a way to kill, exile, murder, do whatever to all the Jewish people, which is totally nowhere near our definition. It’s been driving me crazy,” he added.

The restauranter shared vile messages that had been populating his Instagram page as a result of the blowback, including ones that referred to the soaring death toll in Gaza, claiming “20,000 [is] not nearly enough” and “21,423 subhuman palestines [sic] killed in Gaza!!! Hopefully every corpse is s–t on before being shoveled into the ground.”

“We’re getting bomb threats, threats to bomb our locations. It’s ridiculous. Our Instagram is one page for all the locations, we don’t have individual pages,” Elenani said, adding his wife was scared to leave the home with their newborn child.



Abdul Elenani and Ayat Masoud recently opened the third location of their restaurant in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn.

ayat.nyc / Instagram

Ayat has five other locations, in Bay Ridge and Industry City, Brooklyn, the East Village, Staten Island and Allentown, Pennsylvania, according to its website.

“Somebody emailed our page saying ‘Us Jews will annihilate you. Palestine does not exist. From the river to the sea will be 100 percent Israel. Palestinians need to be killed,’” he said.

Elenani said he does not condone any violence in the region and claims he isn’t aligned with the “evil” mentalities of protesters on either side of the conflict who are calling for violence.

“We believe they’ll continue to exist,” he said of the Jewish state created in 1948.

“Israel needs to stay there. The name ‘Israel’ needs to be there. ‘Palestine’ also needs to be there. It’s a peaceful two-state solution.”

Ditmas Park manager Hania Khattab, 19, who is of Egyptian-Moroccan descent, said Elenani originally put the slogan on the menu as a seafood “pun.”

SECTIONS

# FROM THE RIVER TO



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The seafood section of the menu features the phrase “From the river to the sea,” which has been interpreted as a call for the elimination of the state of Israel.

ayatnyc.com

“He wasn’t doing it with harm or to show people, he said, adding that the phrase was being “used to promote freedom for Palestinians.”

The slogan’s detractors, he said, had a “victim complex” or “victim mindset.”

“They are assuming that that’s what we mean [genocide] by ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,’ but that’s now what we mean at all. When you say ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,’ it’s a call for freedom for all.

“As we know, Palestinians are living in an apartheid state. They have no rights. They have no freedom. And it’s, technically speaking, their homeland. So they’re under occupation.”

A Brooklyn lawmaker who represents the heavily Jewish areas of Borough Park and Midwood took issue with the establishment’s spin on the slogan.

“These restaurateurs may think they are being cute or funny, but that phrase is universally recognized as a call for the annihilation of the Jewish people, and I find it hard to believe they don’t know what they’re doing,” said City Councilman Kalman Yeger, a Democrat.

“They are using Hamas language and claiming it means something different to them.”



The front of Ayat’s menu also features a crying Palestinian woman with the phrase “Down with the occupation.”

Inside the new location, a mural appears to show Palestinian children behind bars underneath the golden dome of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and Israeli soldiers pointing guns at a crying Palestinian woman.

Neighbor Dahlia Schweitzer felt the imagery was “poking the hornet’s nest and they know what they’re doing” even if the owners simply claim “they’re just advocating for freedom.”

“The best analogy that I could think [of] is if a restaurant that had Southern food had the Confederate flag on their menu and tried to spin it as ‘Oh, this is just Southern pride.’

“And it’s like, you know, ‘Don’t be coy.’”

Another resident said they felt the owners were “obviously trying to instigate” a problem, while Lisa Javaherikia said they “have a right to say what they want, and I have a right to go or not.”



Abdul Elenani has said the restaurant has faced backlash since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

ayat.nyc / Instagram

Anthony Babangida, 24, told The Post that he thought the restaurant should be “extra conscientious at a time like this,” adding, “Maybe certain phrases are best left off the menu.”

“That being said, there’s no excuse for threats and bomb scares,” he said. “That’s just hateful and it drives divisiveness. We’re trying to bring two sides together, not drive them apart.”

Alton Baxter, 58, bemoaned the fact that his block had become a “political warzone” and feared violence was coming next.

“People just need to calm the f–k down. It’s a free country, we’re all entitled to use whatever slogans we feel fit, provided they’re not full-on hate — and even those you can technically use,” she said.

“But for God’s sake don’t be threatening violence. This is a peaceful and diverse neighborhood,” he said of Ditmas Park.

“We accept all creeds and colors. I’ll eat in a Palestinian restaurant for lunch and an Israeli restaurant for dinner, and I’m good with both. Let’s all be good with both sides and be done with this bulls–t.”

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