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Google's Complicity in Israeli Apartheid:

How Google Weaponizes "Diversity" to Silence Palestinians and Palestinian Human Rights Supporters

Dear Googlers:

My name is Ariel Koren. I am a Jewish Google worker who has worked at Google for over seven years. I feel so grateful to over 700 Googlers (alongside [25,000 people externally](#)) who recently [signed a petition](#) calling on Google to rescind its act of retaliation against me for protesting [Google's Project Nimbus](#)—a \$1.2 billion dollar contract between Google, Amazon, and the Israeli government and military.

Due to retaliation, a hostile environment, and illegal actions by the company, I cannot continue to work at Google and have no choice but to [leave the company at the end of this week](#). Instead of listening to employees who want Google to live up to its ethical principles, Google is [aggressively pursuing military contracts](#) and stripping away the voices of its employees through a [pattern of silencing](#) and [retaliation](#) towards me and many others. Google is weaponizing its *DEI** and *ERG** systems to justify the behavior, so it is no coincidence that retaliation [has disproportionately impacted](#) women, queer, and BIPOC employees. *[*DEI = Diversity, Equity, Inclusion; ERG = Employee Resource Group*].

I have consistently witnessed that instead of supporting diverse employees looking to make Google a more ethical company, Google systematically silences Palestinian, Jewish, Arab, and Muslim voices concerned about Google's complicity in violations of Palestinian human rights

— to the point of formally retaliating against workers and creating an environment of fear. In my experience, silencing dialogue and dissent in this way has helped Google protect its business interests with the Israeli military and government. I encourage Googlers [to read up on Project Nimbus](#) and to take action at [go/Drop-Nimbus](#).

I also encourage Googlers to [watch and share these videos](#) in which Palestinian Googlers and their Arab, Muslim, and *anti-Zionist Jewish allies speak out.** **[anti-Zionist Jewish = Jewish folks, like myself, who oppose the idea of a Jewish ethno-state and the occupation of historic Palestine].*

As stated on their website, Jewglers is the internal group intended to support “**all** Jewish people at Google.” It is one of several such groups meant to represent employees with a shared identity, and was chartered as a space where all Jewish Googlers can connect, and, if necessary, address discrimination in the workplace. However, in practice, this group is systemically functioning as an outlet to drive forward right-wing ideologies under the guise of promoting diversity. Using its platform and access to Google’s DEI and HR leads, the group has systematically weaponized the control granted to it by the ERG structure to silence the voices of Googlers who support Palestinian freedom. Google leadership relies on this structure to avoid the actual work of listening and responding to its employees who are seeking to hold Google accountable for its relationship with the Israeli government and military. **More on this below:**

I. Google Apologizes for M4BL Donation and Donates to Right-Wing, Non-Black Groups

On June 22, 2020, a month after George Floyd’s murder, the director of [Google.org](#) emailed the Jewglers listerv, to formally apologize to Jewish employees. He cited concern from Jews at the company that Google’s donation to the [Movement for Black Lives](#), M4BL, had unintentionally been antisemitic.

The reason? Jewglers leadership had issued formal complaints to company leadership about the donation, saying it was antisemitic because M4BL, a coalition of dozens of groups, included organizations that had expressed their alignment with the perspectives and language of Palestinian-led groups.

I was mortified and angry. Amidst the uprisings for Black lives, Google issued an **apology** for *donating to the coalition leading the fight against police brutality and murder*, all because Jewglers leadership had deliberately and wrongly conflated support for Palestinian human rights and attempts to hold the Israeli government accountable with discrimination against Jewish people.

The apology from Google did nothing to protect against antisemitism. Instead, it only pitted us against one another, which divides us and makes us less safe. The world is better when all marginalized communities can work together to fight injustice everywhere.

On June 25, 2020, I was part of a group of Jewish Googlers that emailed company leadership asking them to stand by their donation to M4BL. But they ignored us, and instead of standing firm with Black communities fighting for safety and dignity, they continued to endorse the Jewglers by making an official donation of \$400,000 to four right-wing non-Black groups of Jewglers' choosing in the middle of the BLM uprisings.

We attempted dialogue with the steering committee, which is a group of unelected leaders who serve as Jewglers' leadership with decision-making power and the right to formally represent the Jewish voice at Google. However, they forbade us from voicing our perspectives on the Jewglers mailing list, accusing us of manifesting hate for our own Jewish community simply for insisting on solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives and Palestinian rights. Group administrators stated that political discussion about the state of Israel violated Jewglers policy. However, the Jewglers listserv was full of *positive* political messages about Israel; only *criticism* of Israel would get taken down as per this "policy".

One example: Group administrators immediately approved an email inviting Googlers to "tour Hebron from the comfort of your own home," sponsored by the Jewglers chapter in NYC. "[Hebron](#)" is a large city of illegal Israeli settlement sprawled throughout its center on occupied Palestinian land. Palestinians in "Hebron" are subject to [mass displacement of their homes and businesses](#) due to military-enforced apartheid, and a [cruel system of segregated roads](#) and dozens of militarized checkpoints in their own community that restrict native Palestinians' freedom of movement, while allowing for the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. "Hebron" continues to have native Palestinian inhabitants only because of the resilience and resistance of the Palestinian families who have insisted on remaining in their homes.

A Jewish coworker of mine responded to the email thread: "Will the tour include discussion of the ongoing war crimes committed by the Israeli government against the Palestinian population by moving a civilian population into an occupied region?" The Head of the Jewglers Steering Committee immediately flagged this coworker's comment for "discrimination, harassment, and **bullying**" simply because they had voiced concern for Palestinian rights.

This type of interaction is one of many such examples where a simple message of support for Palestinian human rights leads to a disciplinary message or interaction, all while pro-occupation and pro-settlement dialogue receive support. This exact pattern of bias led us to

form our own break-out group, [Jewish-diaspora-solidarity](#) [externally: [Jewish Diaspora in Tech](#)], where Jewish Googlers, and allies, could convene and advocate free of the Jewglers' censorship.

II. Google Uses Jewglers Group to Censor Palestinians and Jewish Allies Amidst Violence in Gaza

A year later, in May 2021, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes into Gaza, killing over 250 Palestinians including over 60 children. Even as Israel [faced global criticism](#) for its [needless violence](#) in Palestine, Jewglers began demanding that Google executive leadership express solidarity with Israel.

It worked. Leaders like Sundar Pichai and Susan Wojcicki sent emails explicitly expressing concern for Israelis, but there was no such communication to or about Palestinians, who are targeted by Israel's daily violence and oppression.

In response, [we wrote to executives](#) about Jewglers' inherent bias. Our letter had 627 signatures but not a single company leader responded. Instead, the company allowed Jewglers steering committee to meet in an official capacity with leaders like Chief Diversity Officer Melonie Parker and Chief People Officer Fiona Cicconi. In spite of widespread dissent from progressive Jews, the company was platforming Jewglers as the sole authority on Jewish identity at Google.

On June 28, 2021, we (a group of 28 Jewish employees) sent another letter to Melonie and Fiona. "We believe Jewglers leadership is using their platform and leadership positions to endorse an agenda that many Jews oppose, while purporting to represent us all," the letter read. "Please refrain from treating Jewglers leadership as the sole credible representation of the Jewish experience or opinion at the company."

At the same time, Palestinian and Arab Googlers, joined by other anti-Zionist Jewish Googlers, were being reported to HR by members of Jewglers for criticism of Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights. Instead of addressing the urgent issues of discrimination at our company, [HR was issuing warnings to Googlers](#) just for speaking out about Palestinian rights.

Members of the Jewglers listserv actively surveiled the Muslim and Arab ERG lists, at some points going so far as to join the listservs and send aggressive messages to our Arab and Muslim colleagues. One member of the Jewglers listserv even listed out the names of Muslim Googlers who had signed [Jewish Diaspora in Tech's letter](#) in support of Palestinian rights, singling them out on a listserv of over 2,000 people because they were Muslim, and inciting bullying against them.

Google pushes for internal dialogue instead of speaking to the press, but email after email went unanswered. We continuously raised alarm bells up the DEI ladder reporting chain, to other company leaders, and through other “proper channels” internally, about the silencing and reprimanding of anti-Zionist Jewish voices. Despite this, leadership continued to platform the Jewglers group as the supposed authority on the Jewish voice at Google.

On June 16, 2021, the group’s administrators “put me on moderation” which essentially means the Jewglers group banned me from freely participating in the group. I reported this to Google’s ERG moderators, but they claimed they were unable to intervene because Jewglers is “self-regulated” by its own (*unelected*) steering committee. And yet, the Jewglers group is officially funded by Google. They receive company money *and* a formal platform as the de facto voice of Jewish Googlers. While the company told us that Googlers who support Israel’s violence “can’t be regulated,” workers who support Palestinian freedom were still receiving official warnings from HR. In some cases simply wearing traditional Palestinian clothing at work led workers to be called into HR for “being divisive”. The bias could not be clearer.

When another Jewish colleague and I received a threatening letter at our office filled with racist, antisemitic screeds against anti-Zionist Jews, we reported the letter to HR and also emailed VP Melonie Parker and SVP Fiona Cicconi, again asking them for a meeting. [[The letter](#) comes with a content warning for racist, antisemitic language, and a death wish.] Our meeting request was ignored once again. HR said they were unable to investigate who had sent the letter. The world’s most sophisticated tech company could not investigate a death-threat letter targeting two of its own employees. The company’s priorities were clear.

It’s simple: just as in any community, Jews have differing backgrounds, political perspectives, and — yes — views on the Israeli government’s actions. We should be free to stand in solidarity with our coworkers *and our users* without fear of reprisal. Millions of Jews oppose Israel’s oppression of Palestinians. Google knows this, and has intentionally silenced hundreds of voices, putting profit over people through contracts like Project Nimbus, and dividing Jewish people from other minority communities through its own ERG system.

III. Google Launches Israeli Government & Military Contract: Project Nimbus

During May 2021, right in the middle of the Israeli military violence, Google quietly announced its most important support of Israel’s violence: Project Nimbus, a \$1.2 billion dollar cloud computing contract between Google, Amazon, and the Israeli government and military. Details are intentionally scarce, but we know Google will help construct data centers and provide cloud infrastructure to several Israeli government agencies, including Israel’s military, and the Israel Land Authority, which is the agency responsible for stealing more

Palestinians' land for illegal Israeli settlements. What's worse, the contract explicitly [prevents Google from shutting down its services in the future](#), including in the event of employee protest. The contract explicitly makes the company powerless to stop its services regardless of whether Israel uses the technology to aid human rights violations. [Documents reported on by The Intercept](#) show that through Project Nimbus, Google will provide advanced AI tools to Israel. The Nimbus training documents emphasize “the ‘faces, facial landmarks, emotions’-detection capabilities of Google’s Cloud Vision API,” and in one Nimbus training webinar, a Google engineer confirmed for an Israeli customer that it would be possible to “process data through Nimbus in order to determine if someone is lying”. It is clear that the tools provided through Nimbus have the potential to [expand Israel’s pattern](#) of surveillance, racial profiling, and other forms of tech-assisted human rights violations.

Since the launch of Nimbus, leading human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have echoed what Palestinian activists and the global community have said for decades: [Israel is an apartheid state](#). Even in the wake of the growing mainstream acknowledgement of Israeli apartheid, Google has stood by its contracts with the Israeli government and military. **The world’s largest search engine is contracting with a military actively carrying out [war crimes](#) and upholding apartheid, while workers have no say in how the technology we provide them is used.**

IV. Google Retaliates for Opposition to Nimbus

In July 2021, I went on disability leave. A few months earlier (March), I had reported an executive on my team for a variety of racist, sexist, and homophobic behaviors, including complaining that women on our team only needed to be half as talented as the men to get hired, frequently using the word f*ggot in front of clients, amongst other hateful slurs too hurtful to list here — alongside dozens of other similar instances. The HR report came after years of escalating the behavior up my reporting chain with no corrective action taken by team management.

Several victims and witnesses to the executive’s behavior, which lasted over three years, came forward, and he was fired as a direct result of the investigation. After he was fired, I took disability leave in order to recover from years of working in such a hostile environment.* (*My performance record, however, remained untouched. I had “Exceeds” (and higher) ratings on Perf, had high respect from cross-functional stakeholders, received Google Cloud’s nomination to Cannes Lions Awards for my creative marketing campaign, had hired and managed two high-performing TVCs, and was promoted twice in 4 years. Relevant*

because there are no possible performance-related reasons for Google's subsequent punitive behavior toward me.)

In October 2021, we published [a formal internal petition](#) calling for Google to be transparent about Project Nimbus and, ultimately, to rescind the contract. Civil society and human rights organizations joined us and launched a public [petition](#) calling on both Google and Amazon to end the contract. We received 800 signatures from Googlers and 37,500 people signed the public petition. To date, Google has yet to respond to the [employee](#) and [public](#) outcry or offer a modicum of transparency.

That October, I was one of two Googlers to speak out publicly about Project Nimbus. I did so while still on disability leave. Two weeks after speaking out, I returned from my disability leave on November 10, 2021. My boss told me that while I had been on disability leave, the company had moved my role to Sao Paulo, effective immediately. I was told I had 17 days to commit to moving [or else lose my role](#). I was told the forced relocation was based on business priorities, however the Sao Paulo office was still working from home and there was no demonstrable need for me to be physically located in Sao Paulo, much less in the middle of a pandemic.

Though I had been given a 17 day turnaround time, after just 2 days, my boss had already begun communicating to the team that I was leaving. When I confronted him, he said: “You mean you would *actually* consider moving to Sao Paulo?”

I immediately filed a complaint. In response, Google hired their own internal investigator (a lawyer who identified as being on retainer with the company) to investigate the retaliation. At the same time, a group of Google workers [circulated a petition](#) calling on Google to rescind its act of retaliation against me, gathering nearly 800 signatures. Civil society organizations circulated [a public petition](#) that now has over 25,000 signatures of public support. Concerned Googlers also successfully lobbied Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, who represents California's 18th District where Google is headquartered, [to write to Google about the act of retaliation](#).

Google's HR team has finally acknowledged to me that the forced relocation was “improper and harmful” but continues to claim that there is “no evidence of retaliation”. When I asked them what “was improper and harmful” about it, if not that it was retaliatory, they responded that this was all “a communication issue.” When I pushed as to why a mid-level employee would be forced to make a transcontinental move with a 17-day turnaround time in the middle of a pandemic immediately after returning from disability leave, HR restated this is all a communication issue, with my direct manager fully and solely to blame.

V. Conclusion

I have made the difficult decision to leave the company as a result of all of this. I have borne constant witness to a pattern of retaliation against workers who stand up for Palestinian rights and for holding the Israeli government and military accountable. Google has consistently sustained a culture of silencing anti-Zionist Jews, and creating toxic and unjust conditions for Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim workers at Google, all while ignoring the widespread internal and public dissent against the company's complicity in Israel's apartheid violence via Project Nimbus. Anti-Zionist Jews at Google will not stop speaking out against Israel's injustices against Palestinians; **but we acknowledge our privilege to do so safely while our Palestinian colleagues and friends are not afforded the same privilege to feel safe and be heard.**

Our Palestinian colleagues deserve better than this; our Palestinian users deserve better than this. The general public deserves better than this.

I am asking my fellow Googlers: Think about what you would have done if you were a worker for [Polaroid in 1970](#), when the company was complicit in South African apartheid. Stay quiet, or take action [like the Polaroid workers](#) who took a stand to end the company's involvement in South Africa? Google employees have the responsibility—and the *power*—to make a difference.

Take action

1. Join over 750 Googlers and over 400 Amazon workers in calling on Google to drop Project Nimbus at [go/drop-nimbus](#). And don't just sign it: discuss this with your managers and your coworkers — talk about it. If you have any power and privilege, use it. Don't be silent and allow your Palestinian colleagues to fight this injustice on their own. [Here is the public petition for folks who don't work at Google: [notechforapartheid.com](#)].
2. Ask Google's leadership to ensure that Jewish Googlers from all backgrounds and political ideologies, including those of us who are anti-Zionist, can be included in conversations about the Jewish community with company leaders.
3. Take action: Next week on September 8th, Google workers supported by the civil society campaign [#NoTechForApartheid](#) will lead direct actions in front of the offices in [the Bay Area](#), [New York City](#), and [Seattle](#). If you are in one of these areas: Show up! [More here](#).

Amplify Palestinian voices

1. Our Palestinian colleagues at Google are bravely sharing their experiences, even in spite of the pervasive culture of retaliation and harassment. Let's all do our part in sharing

these stories from over a dozen of our coworkers as widely as possible– via email, social media, in meetings, wherever you can: bit.ly/google-voices

2. . Share these stories from over a dozen of your coworkers widely via email, social media, in meetings, wherever you can: bit.ly/google-voices

Learn more about...

1. [Being an ally to Palestinians](#) in the fight against [apartheid](#)
2. [Being an ally to Jews in dismantling antisemitism](#)
3. [White Christian Zionism](#), which is the top funding and lobbying source for Israel in the U.S. and globally. Christians United For Israel is the largest Israel lobby in the U.S. with 10 million members (compared to the largest Jewish lobby group AIPAC which has just 100,000 members). It is important to learn about them because CUFI, a white Christian group, has a highly anti-semitic membership base that believes Jews are an inferior race. Understanding how Zionism operates as a tool in the larger machinery of White Christian Supremacy can help you to understand and articulate that anti-Zionism is a central pillar of anti-racism work. [Watch [Til Kingdom Come](#) for more on the antisemitism at the core of the U.S. Christian Zionist movement].

Support these organizations

1. Palestinian-led orgs to support and follow: [Palestinian Youth Movement](#); [US Campaign for Palestinian Rights](#); [Adalah Justice Project](#); [AlQaws](#); [Palestine Legal](#); [Institute for Middle East Understanding](#); [7amleh](#); [@eye.on.palestine](#)
2. Jewish groups and orgs fighting antisemitism and all forms of racism: [Jewish Liberation Fund](#); [If Not Now](#); [Jews For Racial & Economic Justice](#); [Jewish Diaspora in Tech](#); [Never Again Action](#); [The Workers Circle](#); [Jewish Bridge Project](#)
3. Don't be complacent or apathetic; take responsibility for your company and how your labor is used. Help fight retaliation and other forms of institutional violence at Google by joining the [Alphabet Workers Union](#). And people managers: use your position of power to uplift and drive forward the efforts of workers organizing for a more ethical company.