

**February 21**

## **Urgent Open Letter: Reconsideration of Speaker for Melbourne Australia Animal Rights Forum Conference**

Dear Animal Rights Forum Organizers,

We, a global group of dedicated vegan animal rights activists, are writing this open letter with profound concern regarding the inclusion of Maya Cohen-Ronen as a speaker at your upcoming conference.

Maya Cohen-Ronen has publicly espoused harmful rhetoric targeting Palestinians, and has even endorsed their massacre and the ongoing genocide by using dehumanizing language, which included a reference to Palestinians as “vermin”. As advocates for compassion and justice, we firmly believe that individuals who lack empathy for human suffering and endorse oppression should not be granted a platform in an animal rights event that supposedly champions the very essence of compassion.

We applaud the *Animal Rights Forum* and its financial supporters, specifically, *Animal Save Movement*, and *Animals Australia*, for advocating for compassion, and calling for the alleviation of suffering through conscious, kind actions and choices. Notably, the *Animal Save Movement* explicitly opposes all forms of discrimination and oppression, in its efforts to promote a diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement by building coalitions with other social justice groups.

Yet, the invitation of a speaker who openly advocates for violence, and the killing of Palestinians, starkly contrasts with the values you uphold. This dissonance raises concerns about the alignment between stated values and actual actions. In fact, *Animals Australia*, one of your financial supporters, is actively involved in supporting animals in Gaza, via the Sulala Animal Rescue. We find it contradictory that an organization working to alleviate animal suffering in Gaza has agreed to feature a speaker who endorses the killing of humans in the very same country. We are aware that concerns from other activists have been raised, and on November 19, 2023, you responded to these concerns with the following words: “Acknowledging that some people do not feel comfortable with various types of grassroots activism, Maya’s aim is to inspire activists and activists-to-be, encouraging them to harness their skills, talents, gifts, and strengths for the animals.”

How can a war-crazed, pro-genocide individual effectively inspire others to be compassionate?

We have received numerous statements from vegans expressing concerns about the chosen speaker:

“As vegans, but fundamentally as humans, we must stand against one of the worst crimes in history being committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. These crimes are

being live streamed, they are on show for the entire world to watch. We will not stand for Zionist, weaponising the Holocaust to perpetuate another. Israel is causing untold suffering to humans and animals alike, and platforming Zionists is the equivalent of complicity in genocide. History will not look back on you with kindness.”  
- Abdourahamane Ly (African vegan)

“Israel's US backed GENOCIDE in Gaza has now killed over 35,096 Palestinians, including 13,642 CHILDREN! On average, over the last 3.5 months, more than 10 Palestinian kids per day have had to have at least one arm or leg AMPUTATED without anesthesia. Genocide is the evil of all evils, and to invite someone like Maya Cohen-Ronen to speak at your event, is pure madness. If the main principle of veganism is compassion for all beings, then what on Earth are you thinking? If she does appear at your event, you too will have blood on your hands, and land on the wrong side of history. All children are our children, and if we don't stand up for our brothers and sisters in Gaza, who will? Please choose the side of truth and justice. In the words of Dr. King, “Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere.” Thank you.” - Mike McGowan (from the US)

“It is very problematic and unethical to invite someone who openly supports the mass killing of humans to speak about the suffering of our fellow animals. In doing so, we make the community disconnect from reality: the interconnectedness of our world. Defending the Zionist entity in its genocide against Palestinians goes against every moral value we uphold as vegans, and more importantly, as humans. One cannot be an animal rights activist without first having compassion for their fellow humans. Certainly not when they describe them as “vermin”, in the context of which the top Israeli officials (like minister of defence: Yoav Gallant) uses such language to justify the massacre of Palestinians (calling them “human animals”). What does that say about Maya's internal views on animals?” - Waseem (a Palestinian vegan)

"It's antithetical to include a speaker at an animal rights forum who uses problematic language and animalisation in reference to Palestinians, and calls them 'vermin'. For a long time, Zionists have used very dangerous and deliberate language designed to dehumanise Palestinians as a way of justifying the Israeli government's war crimes. Statements like the Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant saying, "We are fighting against animals" are designed to present Palestinians as barbaric, primitive and immoral. To paint a picture that they are 'lesser'. This rhetoric should be very familiar in animal rights circles, as it is the same kind of messaging used to delegitimise the concept of animal rights. It is hypocritical to have a speaker who displays a speciesist attitude which is not consistent with any liberation movement, and it does a grave disservice both to animals and humans alike." - Caroline Louise (from Australia)

"As a Muslim vegan from the Middle East, I'm appalled that you've invited a speaker who has openly endorsed this live-streamed genocide against Palestinians and used derogatory terms like 'vermin.' How can we advocate for a compassionate world and

invite non-vegans to join us when we fail to extend empathy to all sentient beings, be they human or non-human animals?" - Dr Leila Dehghan (from the UK)

As advocates for compassion within the vegan community, we acknowledge the interconnectedness of diverse social justice issues, such as the influence of animal agriculture on the climate crisis. Understanding that putting an end to cruelty towards non-human animals is crucial for the well-being of our planet, we urge you to contemplate the wider consequences of inviting a speaker who supports harm towards human animals.

Furthermore, our dedication to eradicating animal cruelty requires us to bravely speak out against all forms of suffering, uphold integrity, and continually nurture compassion for the injustices we observe in the world. Therefore, we urge you to reconsider Maya Cohen-Ronen's invitation to speak at your conference. Nothing justifies the endorsement of genocide against Palestinians, or anyone anywhere, and including such a speaker contradicts the principles of compassion and justice that we, as vegans, try to uphold. We believe in the importance of consistency in advocating for compassion, not only for non-human animals but also for our fellow human beings. We implore *Animal Rights Forum*, to adopt the values of compassion and integrity they promote and to foster an environment free from the endorsements of violence and oppression.

This letter will be shared with all financial supporters of *Animal Rights Forum*, partnering organizations, other speakers, and the wider vegan community. We hope you won't let us down. We are among you and we are within you, so we will be watching closely.

We look forward to hearing from you.

A group of compassionate vegans

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**February 26 response to 1...**

**We're Only Here for the Animals: Animal Rights Forum Hosts Alleged Zionist, Calls Police on Pro-Palestine Activists and Fracas Ensues...**

[https://naarmveganblogs.wordpress.com/2024/02/26/were-only-here-for-the-animals-animal-rights-conference-hosts-alleged-zionist-calls-police-on-pro-palestine-activists-and-fracas-ensues/?fbclid=IwAR2PnxOCydNzhloL\\_IV508DNAH0me8UXDk-yswJidtbr\\_YQojMXsL4SdZcw](https://naarmveganblogs.wordpress.com/2024/02/26/were-only-here-for-the-animals-animal-rights-conference-hosts-alleged-zionist-calls-police-on-pro-palestine-activists-and-fracas-ensues/?fbclid=IwAR2PnxOCydNzhloL_IV508DNAH0me8UXDk-yswJidtbr_YQojMXsL4SdZcw)