

Facebook refuses to ban all Holocaust-denial groups

CHANTAL ABITBOL

SOCIAL-NETWORKING site Facebook is facing mounting criticism in Australia and overseas after refusing to ban Holocaust-denial groups from its site.

Despite international pressure calling for the popular website to block Holocaust-denial groups, Facebook said it does not take down groups that “speak out against countries, political entities, or ideas”.

The popular site, however, has recently begun to remove Holocaust-denial content in countries such as Israel and Germany, where Holocaust denial is illegal. There are also reports that two other Holocaust-denial pages available in Australia were recently removed.

Facebook’s policy has outraged Australian Jewish groups, which argue that denying the Holocaust is racial vilification – not legitimate speech – and illegal under Australia’s current laws.

“Facebook’s failure to take action over racism on its site was unacceptable,” said B’nai B’rith Anti-Defamation Commission chairperson Tony Levy.

“Unfortunately, we are seeing an increase in anti-Semitic attacks in

Australia. We call on Facebook to remove racist and anti-Semitic material immediately,” Levy said.

Facebook, however, has defended its policies.

“They don’t want to get on the bad side of their users and the people reading their content. They just want to sit there and watch the money pile up.”

Dr Andre Oboler
Expert in social media

“The goal of these policies is to strike a very delicate balance between giving Facebook users the freedom to express their opinions and beliefs – even those that are controversial or that we may find repulsive – while also ensuring that individuals and groups of people do not feel threatened or endangered,” a Facebook spokeswoman said in a statement to *The AJN*.

The spokeswoman said the popular site draws the line with groups that are sponsored by “recognised terrorist organisations” or threaten violence.

But social media expert Dr Andre Oboler, who specialises in anti-Semitism online, said Facebook does not have its “balance” right.

In his recently published paper titled *The Rise and Fall of a Facebook Hate Group*, Dr Oboler examined Facebook’s recent inaction over the controversial Facebook page of the group called “Israel is not a Country! Delist it from Facebook as a Country”.

Eventually, grassroots-activists, the Jewish Internet Defence Force took control of the site in late July 2008 and began to manually dismantle it from the inside.

“Facebook is looking for excuses not to take action,” said Dr Oboler. “They don’t want to get on the bad side of their users and the people reading their content. They just want to sit there and watch the money pile up.”

Looking ahead, Dr Oboler said most likely it will take government legislation to block online hate in user-generated content.

“The clock is slowly ticking,” Dr Oboler said. “If it doesn’t come from within Facebook, it’s going to come through government and be taken out of their hands.”



Double the simcha for great-grandmother

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER Fay Bernstein (pictured) didn’t let her health get in the way of celebrating a rare double simcha when her two great-grandsons – Isaac Necca and Jesse Edelman – were both born on April 14 at the Prince of Wales Hospital. Mrs Bernstein was being treated at the same hospital and was able to hold both her great-grandsons shortly after their birth.

New rule threatens Maccabi in Perth

AJN STAFF

MACCABI Western Australia could lose some of its clubs as a result of the decision by Maccabi Australia Incorporated (MAI) to enforce its Jewish-only membership requirement from the end of next year.

Maccabi WA president Allan Burns told *The AJN* he would shortly begin working through the issue with his clubs. “Would we lose any clubs? Maybe one or two,” he said.

According to Burns, the issue was more pronounced in Perth than on the East Coast. “I don’t know the exact numbers and how they might compare to Sydney and Melbourne.

Burns, who is not Perth-born, said Maccabi had been grappling with the issue for many years.

“It’s probably been an issue in Maccabi for 50 years and its something they have had to deal with along the way as best suits the clubs

and Maccabi,” he said.

The AJN reported last week that Maccabi clubs around Australia had been given until December 31, 2010, to comply with the MAI constitution and ensure their playing lists are exclusively Jewish.

Meanwhile, MAI’s decision received strong endorsement from one Melbourne Jewish sports supporter this week.

Rod Morley, a former president of the AJAX Football Club and whose real estate agency TBM sponsors the Maccabi AJAX Cricket Club, said Maccabi must remain a Jewish organisation. “I wouldn’t be interested in renewing my sponsorship if Maccabi was opened up,” he said.

“The sponsorship is more of a charity donation than a value-for-money proposition and the appeal for me is that it is a Jewish cricket club.”

Your say: 22

STATE OF THE NATION

NAOMI LEVIN

No unfair treatment in Canberra

CANBERRA – A claim of unfair treatment by the ACT Jewish Community was dismissed in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal last week.

The complaint was lodged by Canberra brothers Kurt and Peter Kloska, who were asked to leave the community’s food fair on April 6 last year because of claims that they were neo-Nazis.

The Kloska brothers denied the claim and argued that the incident was humiliating. Sydney barrister David Knoll, former president of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, represented the community, and a strike-out application lodged by the community was granted by the tribunal’s president, Bill

Stefaniak. Stefaniak ruled that the ACT Jewish Community, a volunteer body, was exempt from the ACT Discrimination Act.

SYLVIA DEUTSCH

New kosher cafe for Perth

PERTH – Bnei Akiva youth have opened Perth’s newest kosher eatery, Cafe BA.

The cafe will be open every Sunday at the Maccabi grounds to coincide with soccer games. It will serve kosher burgers, hot dogs and chips, plus confectionary and drinks.

Bnei Akiva madrichim will volunteer and run all aspects of the cafe, which has the support of Maccabi and is supervised by the Kashrut Authority of Western Australia. **THE MACCABEAN**

Cemetery shtiebel on the way

MELBOURNE – A tentative resolution has been reached in the community’s battle to have facilities built at Melbourne’s Lyndhurst Chevra Kadisha Cemetery, first used in mid-2007.

Melbourne Chevra Kadisha (MCK) said last month that a temporary chapel would be built by the end of this year. The facility, expected to be a tin shed, will have heating, air conditioning and toilets. The MCK trustees will also submit an application for a permanent shtiebel, which is expected to seat approximately 500 people.

Until now, mourners have had to drive down a dirt road to the cemetery, which has a plastic marquee with no electricity or permanent toilets.

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