

1 August 2024

Statement from Abdul-Samad Abdullah, University of Melbourne Associate Professor in Arabic Studies:

1. What is the flag shown in the picture?

The flag, although partly folded, shows the following expression: “The Martyr Al-Husain...” This flag is not known to me.

2. Is this a Hamas flag?

NO. The only common thing between this flag and Hamas’ flag is the green colour.

3. What does the flag say?

The flag says: “The Martyr Al-Husain...” The last word is obscured by the folding of the flag.

2 August 2024

Statement from Denis Savelyev, Lecturer in Islam & Arthur Jeffery Centre Administrator Arthur Jeffery Centre:

The flag on the photo is not a Hamas flag.

There are two words that are clearly visible: 'al-shahid' (the martyr), and 'Hussein'. So, it is a Shi'a flag, similar to the ones that are usually used during the Ashura processions.

Best regards,

Denis Savelyev

1 August 2024

Statement from Karima Laachir, ANU Centre for Arab & Islamic Studies:

1. Yes, the flag refers in Arabic to ‘Al-Shahid Hussain’ or the martyr Hussain and it does not have the Muslim Shahada on it which is “there is no God but Allah and Mohamed is His Messenger”. Hussain is an important figure in Shi’a Islam and is highly revered.

2. No it is not a Hamas flag.. in fact, it is not anyone’s flag.

1 August 2024

Statement from Khurram Mehdi, Ashura Committee:

1. What is the flag shown in the picture? Is this a Hamas flag?

This is NOT a Hamas flag. Hamas is not affiliated with the Shia, Islamic Sect. The event was to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain who was the grandson of the prophet Muhammed PBUH. This is an annual procession since 2009.

2. What does the flag say?

The flag in the picture has Arabic calligraphy and has been misinterpreted. The text states (in translation) "There is no day like your day O' Hussain" the Arabic of the name "Hussain" is perhaps the most clear text to identify in the photo presented. This phrase is among the most common among the Shia, Muslims and refers to the day of Ashura (see <https://www.britannica.com/place/Karbala>)

3. Are you aware of any Hamas Flags displayed on the Day of Ashura procession on July 17 in Melbourne?

Hamas has nothing to do with our event and there were no flags of Hamas.

4. Are you aware of any pro-Palestine rally which occurred on July 17 in Melbourne?

Yes. There is what Victoria police refers to a permanent protest at the footsteps of Victorian Parliament and our march went past it so certainly, there will be photos of both that protest and our participants. However, that is a separately organised protest and Ashura committee doesn't have any involvement in that protest organisation.

5. What is your response to the reporting cited above that it is a Hamas Flag at a pro-Palestinian rally and it amounts to a declaration of war?

As event organisers we find it extremely upsetting and disappointing that well established media outlets would continue to behave irresponsibly and cause members of our peaceful community distress.

The march has happened for more than a decade and Victoria police has continually expressed their appreciation for the level of coordination and the peaceful nature of the procession.

Acting Snr Srgt. Kristy Neal called me post event to thank us for our cooperation and to appreciate our attention to political sensitivities.

As the organisers, we remained cognizant of the sympathy felt towards the Palestinian cause and the current turmoil in Gaza within the wider community, and had direct correspondence with members of the pro-Palestine cause who were seeking to collaborate with us. Our response to the Pro-Palestinian event organisers is per the below.

"Ashura for us, is a unique day and it is our foremost policy to ensure that it remains dedicated to the afflictions and martyrdom of Imam Hussain AS".

Yes, a few attendees brought Palestinian flags but there were probably no more than a hand full out of almost 10-12000 participants.

As far as a so called "declaration of war" this is the most ridiculous and I would perhaps say defamatory comment I can imagine. It seems as though there are misguided hate-mongers with nothing better to do in the community as well as mainstream media ready to sensationalise at the drop of a hat.

In the early years of this event, the ABC actually presented this march in the evening news and coincidentally, that year we had decided to put forward a theme of being Anti-ISIS. We are the only people in Australia to have marched against extremism and Islamism. Many of our participants have immediate family members who have in the last week, in Parachinar, Pakistan been killed by the Taliban. Our community is the only vocally anti-terrorism, Muslim community in Australia which makes these claims and misreporting all the more ridiculous, upsetting and an clear indication of racism or discrimination being present in the mainstream media.

1 August 2024

Statement from Rachel Woodlock, Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne:

Not a Hamas flag although extremely unlikely it is possible that a Shia person brought it to a Palestine rally. Much more likely to be from Ashura commemoration.

The full invocation is: "السلام عليك يا ابا عبدالله الحسين الشهيد", which in English is "Peace be upon you, oh Father of 'Abd Allah, Husayn the martyr." In Arabic calligraphy you can place words above and below because the grammar is indicated by manipulation of vowels, suffixes and prefixes (unlike English in which word order is vital).

The bits you can clearly see in the green flag is TOP ROW: "ash-shaheed" (the martyr) MIDDLE ROW: ..."Allah Al-Husayn" (the second half of the title) BOTTOM ROW: half of 'Abd (the first half of the title).

1 August 2024

Statement from Same Berner, Principal Owner, Arabic Communications Experts:

The writing on the flag clearly says "Ya Hasan". It refers to Hasan Al-mujtaba the older son of Imam Ali, and is a Shia symbol. You can see one like it here:

<https://en.shafaqna.com/144622/photos-waving-the-flag-of-imam-hassan-a-s-over-the-dome-of-the-holy-shrines-of-ahl-al-bayt-a-s/>

It is not a Hezbollah flag, which is yellow, and not a Hamas flag either. Hamas flag, although green (green is the colour of the Prophet), has the words "There is no deity but G-d, and Mohamed is his prophet" underneath which there is a sword.

1 August 2024

Statement from Adel Salman, President, Islamic Council of Victoria:

1. What is the flag shown in the picture?

Very difficult to tell. But many flags have the shahada (Islamic testimony of faith) including the flag of Saudi Arabia which is also on a green background.

2. Is this a Hamas flag?

See above, but don't believe so.

3. What does the flag say?

See above. It is very difficult to make out the entire flag but it looks like the flag of Saudi Arabia given that it appears to have the shahada on a green background. Hamas also has a version of a flag with the shahada on a green background. But there could be a number of groups or individuals who have chosen to use a flag with the shahada. The shahada simply says "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is the messenger of Allah", which is the central tenet of the Islamic faith.

4. Are you aware of any Hamas Flags displayed on the Day of Ashura procession on July 17 in Melbourne?

No

5. Are you aware of any pro-Palestine rally which occurred on July 17 in Melbourne?

No

6. What is your response to the reporting cited above that it is a Hamas Flag at a pro-Palestinian rally and it amounts to a declaration of war?

Scaremongering Islamophobic nonsense.