

HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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I. Introduction

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Neil Potts, and I am a Director at Facebook with oversight of the development and implementation of Facebook's Community Standards, which serve as Facebook's rules for what types of content are allowed on our platform. I am a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and the University of Virginia School of Law. Prior to joining Facebook, I served as a ground intelligence officer in the United States Marine Corps and was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I want to start by saying that all of us at Facebook stand with the victims, their families, and everyone affected by the horrific terrorist attack in New Zealand. In the aftermath of such heinous acts, it is more important than ever to stand against hate and violence. We continue to make that a priority in everything we do at Facebook.

Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and to bring the world closer together. Over two billion people come to our platform every month to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, to build their businesses, to volunteer or donate to organizations they care about, to help in a crisis, and to share billions of pictures, stories, and videos about their lives and their beliefs each day. The diversity of viewpoints, expression, and experiences on our platform every day highlight much of what is best about Facebook.

We firmly believe that technology has the power to do good. We also recognize that bad actors may seek to use our platform in unacceptable ways, and we take seriously our responsibility to stop them. As we work to connect people, we strive to make sure those connections remain positive. As we give people a voice, we want to make sure they are not using that voice to hurt others. That is why we have longstanding policies against terrorism and hate, and that is also why last month we instituted a prohibition on praise, support, and representation of white nationalism and white separatism.

I want to be clear: There is no place for terrorism and hate on Facebook. We remove content that incites violence, or that bullies, harasses, or threatens others when we become aware of it.

But determining what content should and should not be removed is not always simple. These decisions can be both far-reaching and novel: how to improve the quality of the discourse on a site as voluminous and varied as ours, how to keep hateful content off the site, and how to do so without hampering free expression. As Mark Zuckerberg noted in his recent op-ed, we should not make so many important decisions about speech on our own and everyone in the social media space should strive to do everything they can to keep the amount of harmful content to a minimum.

For our part, Facebook is creating an independent body so people can appeal our decisions. And we are working with governments on ensuring the effectiveness of our content review systems. But we need a standardized, industry-wide approach for determining the guidelines by which potentially harmful content is reviewed, and by which we assess issues as critical as election integrity, privacy, and data portability.

The rules of the Internet should reflect our society's values for a safe and open Internet. We care about updating these rules because we believe that technology should serve everyone. Conversations like the ones we will have here today are an important part of making that belief a reality, and we appreciate the opportunity to take part in it.

First, I would like to provide you with information about the significant progress we have made in preventing terrorist content from appearing on our platform, and the continuing improvements we intend to make going forward. Second, I want to provide more details about our ban on praise, support, or representation of white supremacy, white nationalism, or white separatism, as well as our other work in keeping hateful content off our platform. And finally, I would like to tell you more about our content moderation policies and our efforts to keep Facebook a safe and welcoming environment for everyone while embracing diverse views and protecting the freedom of speech.

II. Terrorism, Hate Crimes, and Violence

Facebook is meant to be a place for people to express themselves and connect with one another. But unfortunately, there are those who would use the platform instead to spread hatred, violence, and terror. We are committed to protecting the safety of our community, and we remove content threatening that safety.

To do so, Facebook employs more than 30,000 people across the globe focused on safety and security, including blocking and removing terrorist and extremist accounts and their content. And we have specific protocols in place to pass on threats of imminent harm to law enforcement as soon as we become aware of them.

We also are proud to have co-launched the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) more than two years ago to help fight terrorism and extremism online alongside our peers at other technology companies, including Google, YouTube, Microsoft, and Twitter. GIFCT was the culmination of years of informal partnerships among our companies on these issues, and the group has created a shared industry database of

“hashes”—unique digital “fingerprints”—for violent terrorist imagery that we have removed from our services.

Sharing information allows all of us to identify more quickly and more accurately potential extremist content on our respective platforms. Most importantly, it also allows smaller companies the ability to take advantage of our technology and tactics, even with fewer people and resources. We believe that terrorism and extremism are shared problems that require shared solutions, and we encourage all tech companies to join us in our efforts to keep such violence and hate off of online communities.

Since the tragic events in Christchurch, Facebook has been working closely with the New Zealand Police to respond to the attack. At the same time, we have been working to understand how our platform was used so we can prevent such use in the future. I would like to share some of our goals moving forward in this area.

First, we are exploring restrictions on who can go Live depending on factors such as prior Community Standards violations. We also want to improve our matching technology to detect and stop the spread of horrific viral videos. Our current technology can recognize spliced or edited content, but we know that some versions of the New Zealand attacker’s video temporarily slipped our detection. This is a sensitive discussion that we want to avoid having publicly because we know that terrorists follow our statements to try to identify ways to circumvent our systems.

Second, we want to react faster to harmful content on live-streamed video. This includes scrutinizing how to employ AI more effectively and encouraging our users to report content faster. But this is not an easy problem to solve, and we do not expect easy or immediate solutions. What we do expect, and what we will do, is work tirelessly to improve our abilities in these areas, so that we can prevent our platform from playing any role in such horrific acts.

Third, we will continue to proactively detect and combat hate speech and terrorism of all kinds on our platform. We have developed a number of techniques to counter ISIS and al-Qaeda, and we began deploying those techniques against a wider range of terrorist and hate organizations last year.

Fourth, we are expanding our industry collaboration through the GIFCT, and intend to refine and improve our ability to collaborate in a crisis. We have also begun experimenting with sharing URLs systematically rather than just content hashes and are working to address the range of terrorists and violent extremists operating online.

We have made significant progress in our efforts to stamp out hate and violence on our platform, but we know we have more work to do. We will continue to review our policies constantly, to develop and adopt further technical solutions, and to strengthen our partnerships with external stakeholders, all of which will allow us to find more effective ways to combat terrorism, extremism, and hate.

III. Hate Speech and White Supremacy, White Nationalism, and White Separatism

Hate can take many forms beyond overt terrorism and none of it is permitted in our community. We do not allow hate speech on our platform because it creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion that limits people's willingness to communicate and share with one another. We remove hate speech whenever we become aware of it, and we are continually working on developing new or improved technologies that let us more quickly and more accurately identify and eliminate such content. For example, in the first three quarters of 2018, we took action on about 8 million pieces of content containing hate speech.

In fact, Facebook rejects not just hate *speech*, but all hateful ideologies. Our rules have always been clear that white supremacists are not allowed on our platform under any circumstances, and we have banned more than 200 white supremacist groups under our Dangerous Organizations policy. But even under that policy, we had previously viewed white nationalism and white separatism as distinct from white supremacy. While we removed content from white nationalist or white separatist groups that violated our policies, we did not remove the accounts of such groups wholesale.

We were reluctant to ban such groups outright because we did not want to ban *all* nationalist and separatist ideas—recognizing that patriotism, for example, is an important part of many people's identities. But after meeting with experts in race relations around the world and conducting our own review of hate figures and organizations, we are convinced that white supremacy cannot be meaningfully separated from white nationalism and white separatism.

Therefore, we announced that we are updating our policies to make it clear that all praise, support, and representation of white nationalism and white separatism violates our rules. We will now use our Dangerous Organizations policy to remove any praise, support, or representation of white nationalism and white separatism from our platform.

But our efforts to combat hate do not stop there. We will also start connecting people who search for terms associated with white supremacy, white nationalism, or white separatism to resources focused on helping people leave behind hate groups. People searching for these terms will be directed to Life After Hate, an organization founded by former violent extremists that provides crisis intervention, education, support, and outreach. We believe that by connecting individuals to Life After Hate, we can try to address the root of the problem in addition to addressing the hateful and dangerous actions that can result.

We recognize the serious harm that hateful content can inflict in any community, including ours, and we continue to be committed to finding new and better ways to combat hate on Facebook and to keep our community one that is always welcoming and safe.

IV. Content Moderation and Neutrality

Our Community Standards and related policies work to balance our goals of giving people a place to express themselves genuinely while also promoting a welcoming and safe environment for everyone.

We created our Community Standards in an effort to standardize our content removal decisions. Our Standards outline publicly and transparently what is and is not allowed on Facebook. They apply around the world to all types of content and are designed so they can be applied consistently and fairly to a community that transcends regions, cultures, and languages.

At the same time, we believe in embracing diverse views. Unless we are confronted with a specific potential harm, we tend to err on the side of allowing content, even when some people find it objectionable or offensive. These can be difficult decisions, and we will not get them all right, but we strive to apply our policies consistently and fairly to a global and diverse community.

To be clear, our Community Standards do not prohibit discussing controversial topics or espousing a debated point of view; nor do they favor opinions on one end of the political spectrum or the other. We believe that such discussion is critical to promoting greater understanding among members of our community.

But our process for gauging what meets and what does not meet those Standards is not perfect. We have made mistakes. We know that there have been a number of high-profile content removal incidents affecting individuals across the political spectrum. My colleague, Monika Bickert, spoke with you last year about some of the concerns such incidents had raised. Today, I wanted to provide you with a brief update about some of the actions we have taken to address those concerns:

- We have created an appeals process for content that was removed from our platform as hate speech and are working to create an independent oversight board of experts on free speech and safety to decide those appeals transparently.
- We now publish a Community Standards Enforcement Report that describes the amount and types of content we have taken action against, as well as the amount of content we have proactively flagged for review.
- We have asked former Senator Jon Kyl to advise the company on any potential bias against conservative voices.
- Laura Murphy, a national civil liberties and civil rights leader, as part of an independent civil rights audit, is coordinating with civil rights groups to help advise Facebook on how to empower users with a diversity of opinions while encouraging civil discourse.

- We have partnered with over 100 groups across the political spectrum. We believe that these groups' input will help us to improve over time and ensure we can most effectively serve our diverse community.
- And we are continuing to expand our list of outside partner organizations so that we regularly receive feedback on our content policies from a diverse set of viewpoints.

While we will continue to take steps on our own to improve, we hope that we have a broader discussion with the industry regarding decisions about what speech is harmful. People should be able to expect that companies will address these issues in a consistent way. We should have a broader debate about what we want as a society and how regulation can help. We believe Facebook has a responsibility to help address these issues, and we are looking forward to discussing them with lawmakers around the world, including during our discussion here today.

V. Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate our deep commitment to building a community that encourages and fosters free expression, as well as to stopping terrorists, extremists, and hate groups from using our platform to promote abhorrent ideologies. We want Facebook to be a place where individuals with diverse viewpoints can connect and exchange ideas. There is a lot more to do, but we are proud of the significant progress we have made over the last few years. Still, we know that people have questions about what we are doing to continue that progress, and we are looking forward to working with the members of this Committee, other policymakers, and others in the tech industry and civil society to continue the dialogue around these issues. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.