



Testimony of Alexandria Walden  
Global Human Rights & Free Expression Policy Counsel, Google  
House Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on "Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism"  
April 9, 2019

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins, and members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I appreciate your leadership on the important issues of hate speech and free expression online, and welcome the opportunity to discuss Google's work in these areas.

My name is Alexandria Walden, and I serve as the global policy lead for human rights and free expression for Google. Throughout my career, I have worked on a number of issues in the civil and human rights field, including criminal justice reform, violence against women, and voting rights. In my work at Google, and specifically with YouTube, I advise the company on how we can preserve our deep commitment to free expression and access to information in a complicated global operating environment. As part of these efforts, I am especially mindful of how these concepts can be a cornerstone for human rights defenders around the world.

Broadly, the Internet has been a force for creativity, learning, and access to information. At Google, supporting this free flow of ideas is core to our mission to organize and make the world's information universally accessible and useful. We build tools that empower users to access, create, and share information like never before — giving them more choice, opportunity, and exposure to a diversity of opinions. Products like YouTube, for example, have expanded economic opportunity for small businesses to market and sell their goods; have given artists, creators, and journalists a platform to share their work, connect with an audience, and enrich civic discourse; and have enabled billions to benefit from a bigger, broader understanding of the world. In addition, digital platforms like YouTube have long been a place for breaking news, exposing injustices, and sharing content from places without access to other forms of media. The economic benefits have also never been clearer: many creators make a living through the content they post on the platform. YouTube channels making over six figures in revenue are up 40 percent over the last year.

This openness has democratized how stories, and whose stories, get told. It has created a space for communities to tell their own stories. And it has created a platform where anyone can be a creator and can succeed. Around 2 billion people come to YouTube every month. We see over 500 hours of video uploaded every minute - making it one of the largest living collections of human culture ever assembled in one place. The vast majority of this content is positive — ranging from how-to videos, family vloggers, and funny pet videos, to educational and cultural

content and more. In fact, learning and educational content drives over a billion views on YouTube every single day.

We strive to make information from the web available to all our users, but not all speech is protected. We respect the laws of the nearly 200 countries and territories in which we offer services. Once we are on notice of content that may violate local law, we evaluate it and block it for the relevant jurisdiction. For many issues, such as privacy, defamation, or hate speech, our legal obligations may vary country by country as different jurisdictions have come to different conclusions about how to deal with these complex issues. In the case of all legal removals, we share information about government requests for removal in our Transparency Report.

We know, however, that the very platforms that have enabled these societal benefits may also be abused, ranging from the annoying, like spam, to the criminal, like child pornography. This is why in addition to being guided by local law, we have Community Guidelines our users have to follow.

Before I explain how we enforce our policies, I want to state clearly that every Google product that hosts user content prohibits incitement to violence and hate speech against individuals or groups based on particular attributes, including race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and veteran status. We view both as grave social ills, so our policies go well beyond what the United States requires.

We are deeply troubled by the recent increase in hate and violence in the world, particularly by the acts of terrorism and violent extremism in New Zealand. We take these issues seriously and want to be a part of the solution.

## **II. YOUTUBE ENFORCEMENT**

Tough policies have to be coupled with tough enforcement. Over the past two years, we have invested heavily in machines and people to quickly identify and remove content that violates our policies against incitement to violence and hate speech:

- 1) YouTube's enforcement system starts from the point at which a user uploads a video. If it is somewhat similar to videos that already violate our policies, it is sent for humans to review. If they determine that it violates our policies, they remove it and the system makes a "digital fingerprint" or hash of the video so it can't be uploaded again. In the fourth quarter of 2018, over 70% of the more than 8 million videos reviewed and removed were first flagged by a machine, the majority of which were removed before a single view was received.
- 2) Machine learning technology is what helps us find this content and enforce our policies at scale. But hate and violent extremism are nuanced and constantly evolving, which is why we also rely on experts to find videos the algorithm might be missing. Some of these experts sit at our intel desk, which sits in-house and proactively looks for new trends in

content that might violate our policies. We also allow expert NGOs and governments to notify us of bad content in bulk through our Trusted Flagger program. We reserve the final decision on whether to remove videos they flag, but we benefit immensely from their expertise.

- 3) Finally, we go beyond enforcing our policies by creating programs to promote counterspeech on our platforms to present narratives and elevate the voices that are most credible in speaking out against hate, violence, and terrorism.
  - a) For example, our Creators for Change program supports creators who are tackling tough issues, including extremism and hate, by building empathy and acting as positive role models. There are 60 million video views of Creators for Change content to date; 731,000 total watch time hours of Creators for Change content; and through 'Local chapters' of Creators for Change, creators tackle challenges specific to different markets.
  - b) Google's Jigsaw group, an incubator to tackle some of the toughest global security challenges, has deployed the Redirect Method, which uses Adwords targeting tools and curated YouTube playlists to disrupt online radicalization. The method is open to anyone to use, and we know that NGOs have sponsored campaigns against a wide-spectrum of ideologically-motivated terrorists.

It is also important to note that hate speech removals can be particularly complex compared to other types of content. Hate speech, because it often relies on spoken cues rather than visual ones, is sometimes harder to detect than some forms of branded terrorist propaganda. It is intensely context specific and it can be contentious as there is often disagreement on what could be considered political speech. On the opposite end, overaggressive enforcement can also inadvertently silence voices that are using the platform to make themselves heard about important issues. That's why we've also invested heavily here to use our automated flagging technology to quickly send potential hate speech for review by our human review teams. In the fourth quarter of 2018, we removed nearly 58,000 videos for hate and harassment compared to 49,000 for violent extremism.

Often times in this space, we have found that content can sit in a gray area that comes up right against the line and may be offensive, but does not directly violate YouTube's policies against incitement to violence and hate speech. When this occurs, we have built a policy to drastically reduce a video's visibility by making it ineligible for ads, removing its comments, and excluding it from our recommendation system. In particular, we understand the issues around YouTube's recommendation system have been top of mind. This is why several months ago, we also updated our recommendation systems to begin reducing recommendations of even more borderline content or content that can misinform users in harmful ways.

Before I conclude, I'd like to say a final word about Neo-Nazism and white supremacist content. We block Nazi content in countries where it is illegal. Furthermore, a lot of content produced by Neo-Nazis and white supremacists violates our policies on hate speech or violence and is removed globally. For borderline content, we take measures to hamper its dissemination by

ensuring it cannot be recommended, monetized, or commented on. YouTube’s commitment to free expression and access to information means that we sometimes preserve views that may be objectionable or offensive — but we are also willing to revisit where we draw that line in consultation with experts on civil rights, civil liberties, hate, terrorism, and representatives from impacted communities.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

As I mentioned at the start, we build our products for all of our users from all political stripes around the globe. The long term success of our business is directly related to our ability to earn and maintain the trust of our users. We have a natural and long-term incentive to make sure that our products work for users of all viewpoints. We will continue to pursue that trust by encouraging and acting on feedback about ways we can improve.

We also understand that people will value these services only so long as they continue to trust them to work well and provide them with the most relevant and useful information. That is why hate speech and violent extremism have no place on YouTube. We believe we have developed a responsible approach to address the evolving and complex issues that manifest on our platform.

In formulating and applying our policies, YouTube seeks to balance and preserve “Four Freedoms”—freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of opportunity and freedom to belong. It also seeks to balance free expression with preventing the spread of content that violates its Community Guidelines in order to maintain a vibrant community. Striking this balance is never easy, especially for a global platform operating in societies that have different standards for when speech crosses the line.

Thank you for the opportunity to outline our efforts in this space. I’m happy to answer any questions you might have.