

February 22, 2018

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Ms. Juniper Downs  
Director Public Policy and Government Relations  
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Mr. Carlos Monje, Jr.  
Director, Public Policy and Philanthropy, U.S. & Canada  
Twitter  
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San Francisco, CA 94103

Ms. Bickert, Ms. Downs, and Mr. Monje:

The undersigned civil rights and advocacy organizations write to share our concerns regarding your recent testimony at the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing titled, "Terrorism and Social Media: #IsBigTechDoingEnough?" Many of the undersigned organizations have had ongoing conversations with your companies regarding the spread of hateful and dangerous content online, and in light of this, we watched your testimony regarding extremist content online with great interest. We were alarmed by the continuous conflation of Muslims and violent extremism at the hearing and the extent to which testimony focused on conduct by Muslims, with comparatively almost no mention about violent actions by white supremacists who target members of the African American, LGBTQ, immigrant, Latino, Asian, Jewish, Sikh and Muslim communities. These omissions are particularly striking in light of the recent tragic attacks in New Mexico, Portland, and Charlottesville.

To no avail, several of the signatories below reached out to you prior to the hearing to request that your companies avoid stigmatizing and singling out the Muslim community by failing to address other forms of extremism in your testimony. All three of your statements for the record failed to do so; they referenced only violent extremism

committed by those claiming to be acting in the name of Islam and highlighted efforts at countering extremism that focus on Muslim communities. Facebook's written testimony, for example, did not mention white supremacist violence, but repeatedly cited ISIS and Al-Qaeda.<sup>1</sup> And, in response to questioning from Senator John Thune (R-SD), the Facebook representative volunteered Boko Haram – another group claiming to act in the name of Islam – as an example of a group whose content has been banned by their company.<sup>2</sup> Later, when Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) directly asked the Facebook witness what the company is doing to curtail the explosion of white supremacists online, once again, Facebook failed to mention white supremacy in the response. In fact, in response to questioning regarding domestic extremism – specifically violence by white nationalists and white supremacists – the Google witness was the only panelist to specifically mention “white supremacy,” albeit briefly.<sup>3</sup> It is striking that such complex questions seem to consistently elicit simple, and near-uniform answers.

Furthermore, it was very unhelpful that each of your companies chose to highlight your support or participation in violent extremism initiatives designed to target Muslims and others as examples of the work you are doing to fight extremism. For example, Twitter's testimony stated that the company has participated in more than 100 CVE trainings over the last few years including summits at the White House. We are concerned that most of these events were focused primarily on activities by Muslims. In addition, all three companies continue to emphasize their sponsorship of Tech Against Terrorism events, one of which, in the San Francisco Bay Area, focused exclusively on extremism by Muslims. Other Tech Against Terrorism events have given some attention to white supremacy, but not nearly enough and not on a par with the attention given to Muslims and extremism. In one example, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), one of our nation's leading experts on hate groups and white supremacy, was invited to a Tech Against Terrorism conference in Brussels and given less than a week's notice of the event. When SPLC requested to participate via video conference due to the short notice, they received no response. If there is a true commitment by the companies to address white supremacy and other forms of violent extremism unrelated to Islam through this initiative, more lead time is necessary to appropriately engage relevant experts and stakeholders. Additionally, as recently as last week, presentations by Facebook, Google and Twitter at an event organized

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<sup>1</sup> Bickert, M. (2018, January 17). Hearing before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Retrieved January 22, 2018, from [https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/a9daccb8-5f07-42a6-b4c3-20ad0b9ba26d/FC0A5B87F787273A7FA793B458C03E41.bickert-testimony-final.pdf](https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/a9daccb8-5f07-42a6-b4c3-20ad0b9ba26d/FC0A5B87F787273A7FA793B458C03E41.bickert-testimony-final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Terrorism and Social Media: #IsBigTechDoingEnough. (2018, January 17). Retrieved January 22, 2018, from <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4709695%2Fbickert-response>

<sup>3</sup> Terrorism and Social Media: #IsBigTechDoingEnough. (2018, January 17). Retrieved January 22, 2018, from <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4709693%2Fms-bickert-response>

by the Department of Homeland Security focused heavily on activities designed to address extremism by those claiming to act in the name of Islam.

At a time when anti-Muslim, anti-Black, anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant and anti-Jewish sentiment have fueled a marked increase in violent attacks on individuals in each of these communities, a responsible discussion regarding violent extremism must include a focus on white supremacists and other non-Muslim violent extremists. On far too many occasions, discussions about terror do not acknowledge that no ideology owns violent extremism. The failure to recognize white supremacy and other forms of violent extremism unrelated to Islam in discussions regarding extremism is irresponsible and reckless, and your failure to adequately address this publicly during the Senate hearing stigmatizes Muslims and other affected communities when the facts on this issue are clear. In their 2017 annual report on extremism in the United States, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) concluded that the number of murders committed by white supremacists in the United States doubled from the previous year, nothing 71% of extremist-related murders in the past decade have been carried out by right-wing extremists, a majority of whom were born in the United States.<sup>4</sup> And in 2017, 53% of extremist-related murders in the United States were perpetrated by white supremacists.<sup>5</sup>

We have raised at least some of our concerns either with your parent companies, or with your companies directly. One recent example, is the letter sent on October 31st, 2017, by 19 civil rights groups to Facebook citing the company's inadequate response to hate speech and bigotry directed toward members of the African-American, LGBTQ, and Muslim community on its platform, as well as problematic CVE activities.<sup>6</sup> Given your companies' size, influence, and role in all discussions of hateful and violent content online, we again call on you to join us in a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue on extremism and extremist violence.

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<sup>4</sup> ADL Report: White Supremacist Murders More Than Doubled in 2017. (2018, January 17). Retrieved January 22, 2018, from <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-report-white-supremacist-murders-more-than-doubled-in-2017>

<sup>5</sup> Williams, J. (2017, October 02). White American men are a bigger domestic terrorist threat than Muslim foreigners. Retrieved January 22, 2018, from <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/10/2/16396612/las-vegas-mass-shooting-terrorism-islam>

<sup>6</sup> Simpson, S. (2017, October 31). Civil Rights Groups Urge Facebook to Address Longstanding Issues with Hate Speech and Bigotry. Retrieved January 22, 2018, from <https://www.muslimadvocates.org/19civilrightsgroupslettertofacebook/>

As we continue this important dialogue, we urge each of your companies to:

- Submit amended testimony for the hearing regarding the dangers posed by white supremacist groups and the measures your organization will be taking as a result;
- Bring on an independent third-party team to conduct a thorough and public audit of the civil rights impact of your policies and programs, including an assessment of processes related to addressing extremism by white supremacists and other hate-based content on your platforms that encourages harassment and violence towards many communities;
- Assign and publicly name a senior member of the executive team with authority to oversee addressing hate on the platform company-wide;
- Hire or contract with a diverse team of experts on white supremacist groups to develop methods for detecting and responding to such groups, and to address hateful conduct and content by these groups;
- Create a committee of outside advisors with expertise in identifying and tracking hate who will be responsible for producing an annual and publicly available report on the effectiveness of the steps taken by the company; and,
- Disclose publicly any new plans that have been developed to address extremism, including whether those plans will target Muslims or seriously address white supremacists.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Arab American Institute  
Bend the Arc Jewish Action  
Center for Media Justice  
Color of Change  
CREDO  
Emgage  
Media Matters for America  
MoveOn.Org  
Muslim Advocates  
NAACP  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)  
National LGBTQ Task Force  
National Sikh Campaign  
Sikh Coalition  
Southern Poverty Law Center