



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 18, 2019

Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism
c/o Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Facebook
Susan Wojcicki, CEO, YouTube
Jack Dorsey, CEO, Twitter
Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg, Ms. Wojcicki, Mr. Dorsey, and Mr. Nadella:

I write to you in the wake of the horrific acts of terrorism at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, which killed at least 50 people and wounded 50 more. I was deeply concerned to learn that one of the shooters live-streamed his terror attack on Facebook, and the video was subsequently reuploaded on Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms. The video was widely available on your platforms well after the attack, despite calls from New Zealand authorities to take these videos down.

Your companies jointly formed the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) in June 2017 in order to disrupt the use and exploitation of your platforms by terrorists. In July 2017, GIFCT representatives briefed this Committee on your companies' commitment to combatting and removing terrorism-related content. But just last week—nearly two years after you formed GIFCT—a terrorist exploited your platforms to disseminate across the world a horrific video of mass violence.

I must emphasize how critically important it is for you to prioritize the removal of this sort of sensitive, violent content. Studies have shown that mass killings inspire copycats¹—and you must do everything within your power to ensure that the notoriety garnered by a viral video on your platforms does not inspire the next act of violence.

¹ See, e.g., Maggie Fox, *Mass killings inspire copycats, study finds*, NBC NEWS, July 2, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/yes-mass-killings-inspire-copycats-study-finds-n386141>; *Number of mass shootings in US has risen sharply, FBI report says*, THE GUARDIAN, Sep. 25, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/25/us-mass-shootings-risen-sharply-fbi-report> (“‘The copycat phenomenon is real,’ said Andre Simons of the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit. ‘As more and more notable and tragic events occur, we think we’re seeing more compromised, marginalized individuals who are seeking inspiration from those past attacks.’”)

On GIFCT's website, your companies tout your record in removing terrorism-related content. With regard to Facebook, you claim, "99% of ISIS and Al Qaeda-related terror content that is removed from Facebook is content that is detected before anyone in its community has flagged it, and in some cases, before it goes live on the site."² However, the public has largely been kept in the dark regarding metrics associated with other violent extremists, including far-right violent extremists. According to one report, Facebook was alerted by New Zealand police that the Christchurch video was posted on its platform, rather than the video being targeted by the platform's counterterrorism algorithms.³ According to another report, YouTube could not contain the volume of video reposts being uploaded for about 24 hours after the attack, and even though the flood of videos has since slowed, the systemic flaws that allowed this terrorist content to spread on YouTube have not been resolved.⁴

You must do better. It is clear from the recent pattern of horrific mass violence and thwarted attempts at mass violence—here and abroad—that this is not merely an American issue but a global one. Your companies must prioritize responding to these toxic and violent ideologies with resources and attention. If you are unwilling to do so, Congress must consider policies to ensure that terrorist content is not distributed on your platforms—including by studying the examples being set by other countries.

I respectfully request a briefing before the Committee on Homeland Security on March 27, 2019, regarding your response to the dissemination of the video of the New Zealand terrorist attack on your platforms and how your companies intend to prevent this disturbing incident from happening again.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman

² GIFCT: About, <https://www.gifct.org/about/> (accessed Mar. 15, 2019); see also Julia Fioretti, *Facebook reports progress in removing extremist content*, REUTERS, Nov. 28, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-counterterrorism/facebook-reports-progress-in-removing-extremist-content-idUSKBN1DT003>.

³ Sherisse Pham, *Facebook, YouTube and Twitter struggle to deal with New Zealand shooting video*, CNN, Mar. 15, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/15/tech/new-zealand-shooting-video-facebook-youtube/index.html>.

⁴ Elizabeth Dwoskin & Craig Timberg, *Inside YouTube's struggles to shut down video of the New Zealand shooting – and the humans who outsmarted its systems*, WASHINGTON POST, Mar. 18, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/03/18/inside-youtubes-struggles-shut-down-video-new-zealand-shooting-humans-who-outsmarted-its-systems/>.