

Adalah The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

عدالة المركز القانوني لحقوق الأقلية العربية في إسرائيل

עזאלה המרכז המשפטי לזכויות המיעוט הערבי בישראל



31 October 2016

Mr. Richard Allan

Facebook's Head of Policy in Europe and the Middle East

Re: Serious concerns regarding violations of freedom of expression rights, selective application of Israel-Facebook agreement to combat online incitement

We are contacting you in regard to the recent announcement of an agreement between Facebook and the Israeli government concerning a plan to cooperate in combatting online incitement on Facebook's social network.

In mid-September 2016, media reports showed that a meeting was held between representatives of Facebook and officials from the Israeli government, including Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan. According to these reports, the representatives agreed to take a number of measures to combat incitement on Facebook. In addition, before the reports of the meeting emerged, Minister Shaked unveiled data on the cooperation between the Israeli authorities and Facebook at the 16th annual Conference on Counter-Terrorism in Ashkelon, Israel, in September 2016. [According to the figures presented](#), the Israel authorities had submitted 158 requests to Facebook to remove inciting content, with 95% of those requests being approved.

As a legal center and human rights organization based in Israel, which works to protect the rights of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel as well as Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, Adalah views the adoption of these joint measures between Facebook and the Israeli government with great concern. We fear that these measures will be used by Israel in a discriminatory and politically-motivated manner that would violate the rights to freedom of expression for many Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel who express positions and language that dissent from the views of the Israeli government and the Israeli mainstream public.

Above all, we wish to draw attention to the Israeli authorities' history of selective enforcement when it comes to incitement on online social networks. According to [data published by the Berl Katznelson Foundation](#), an Israeli institute, during the period from June 2015 to May 2016, there were 175,000 recorded posts in Israel that called for violence via social networks. 70% of these calls for violence were made by politically right wing Jewish individuals, with 50% of their calls being directed against Arabs and 20% directed against left wing Jews.

These figures thus clearly show that the main people targeted by incitement on social media in Israel are in fact people who publicly oppose discrimination against the Palestinian minority in Israel and oppose the continuation of the occupation of the Palestinian territories – both of which are policies promoted by the Israeli government.

Notably, a significant number of online statements that may constitute incitement are made by Israeli government officials themselves, including by Justice Minister Shaked, who has used her Facebook page to make violent and racist comments against Palestinians (referring to them as "snakes") and against African asylum seekers. For example, in July 2014, Minister Shaked [published a post on Facebook](#) calling for the killing of Palestinian mothers, saying: "They should follow their sons, nothing would be more just. They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the

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snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there." At the time, the post received more than 4,900 likes and 1,200 shares, as well as comments from followers that echoed the post's racist and violent sentiment.

We therefore request that Facebook provide more information about the details of its agreement with the Israeli government, and that Facebook investigate further into the serious concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

Mohammad Bassam, Adv.

Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

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