



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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Dear Mr. Kaplan, Mr. Beckerman, and Ms. Gadde:

I write with urgent concern regarding reports of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok censoring content and disabling user accounts on your respective platforms that are raising awareness about recent Israeli state-backed violence on the Palestinian people. It is critical to ensure that your companies, whether intentional or unintentional, do not have algorithms and staff that silence people based on their ethnicity or religious affiliation.

As you know, this month Israel forcibly removed Palestinian families from the Sheikh Al Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem in order to make way for Israeli settlers, an action that is patently illegal under international law. Following these evictions, Israeli police and military forces assaulted Palestinian worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque during one of the holiest nights of the year in Islam. Israel engaged in a disproportionate escalation that killed hundreds of civilians, including children, destroyed schools, media offices, homes, United Nations facilities and the only COVID-19 testing facility in Gaza.

With reporting in the mainstream media often ignoring and silencing Palestinian voices, social media has become a crucial source for information, pictures, and videos documenting the injustices that Palestinians face. Social media accounts have been some of the only places for Americans to access first-hand accounts of the occupation and violence from Palestinians on the ground. That is why these reports are particularly troubling—Palestinians often have nowhere else to turn to make their voices heard other than social media.

My email inbox has been filled with reports of your companies improperly removing and suspending posts and accounts highlighting Israeli apartheid and violence against the Palestinian people. I understand that your companies have acknowledged that these removals and suspensions have indeed been occurring and are attributing them to systematic errors. It is not enough to continue to blame technical errors by automated systems and algorithms. I know that these processes and systems have humans who create and maintain them; thus, biases are automated as well. Moreover, the employees at your companies are the ones that ultimately make the final determination of what content is acceptable and what is not.

It is also important to note that the Israeli government and its supporters have pressured social media companies like yours to adopt a definition of anti-Semitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) that would explicitly treat criticism of Israel and Zionism, a political ideology, the same as racism towards the Jewish people. This assertion is false and dangerous, and, as one of Facebook's own moderators noted in a recent article in *The Intercept*, the company's policy around posts, "leaves very little wiggle room for criticism of Zionism".¹ The liberation movement for Palestine is centered on equality and justice for all people, regardless of religion, and is proud to stand with all people of Jewish faith in the face of the disgusting surge in hateful, anti-Semitic attacks against them. This definition, which is out of step with broadly accepted definitions and which has been criticized by more than 40 Jewish human rights organizations², has been extensively used as a tool to suppress political speech that is not in line with the views and policies of the Israeli government. Given this wider context, I believe these concerns of censorship are especially relevant and warranted.

Recent reporting in the *New York Times* also sheds light on a disturbing double-standard: while posts and accounts sharing Palestinian perspectives are censored and restricted, extremist Israeli groups openly use Facebook-owned WhatsApp to coordinate violent mob attacks on Palestinians.³ Extremists are allowed to use the platform to organize hate crimes with messages like "Death to the Arabs" in channels urging Israelis to join street brawls against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and we have seen the tragic results of these attacks play out across Israel. Coordinating violence clearly crosses any acceptable free speech line. I cannot understand how Facebook can justify censoring peaceful Palestinian voices while providing an organizing platform for extremist hate.

To better understand the situation and your respective companies' policies, I respectfully request clarification on the following issues:

1. What role do human moderators at your companies have in determining whether content should be removed? What is done to ensure that their biases do not allow for acceptable content to be improperly removed?

¹ Biddle, Sam. "Facebook's Secret Rules About the Word 'Zionist' Impede Criticism of Israel." *The Intercept*, 14 May 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/05/14/facebook-israel-zionist-moderation/>.

² Jewish Voice for Peace. "First-Ever: 40+ Jewish Groups Worldwide Oppose Equating Antisemitism with Criticism of Israel." *Jewish Voice for Peace*, 26 July 2018.

³ Frenkel, Sheera. "Mob Violence Against Palestinians in Israel Is Fueled by Groups on WhatsApp." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 19 May 2021.

2. What standards of allowable content are human moderators referencing? Please provide a copy of your content moderation policy and training materials provided to human moderators.
3. Have human moderators ever received training specific to content related to Israel and Palestine? If so, please provide those training materials.
4. Do you allow algorithmic content moderation? Are any decisions to remove or restrict content made without human input? If so, please explain the standards utilized.
5. How are your companies ensuring that Palestinian voices are being heard in your decision-making process regarding the treatment of content about Palestine and Israel?
6. What are your companies doing to prevent extremists from using your platforms to organize and direct terror attacks against Palestinians, as detailed in the *New York Times*? Will Facebook delete these extremist WhatsApp groups?
7. Why were your platforms not prepared to properly handle content and engagement regarding Israel and Palestine? What steps are you taking to ensure that in these issues do not arise again?
8. What is the relationship between the Facebook Cyber Unit, its Twitter and TikTok equivalents, and foreign governments regarding removing or censoring information that they are opposed to? Did you specifically receive any contact from any government regarding posts and accounts regarding Palestine this month?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical issue. I look forward to your response, and want to reiterate that my team and I are always open to engaging directly with you and your teams to help you ensure that these issues are being addressed in a transparent fashion through a process that makes sure that the voices of all vested parties are being heard.

Sincerely,



RASHIDA TLAIB
Member of Congress