Future-Proofing the Christchurch Call: Establishing a Working Group to Mitigate against Terrorist, Violent and Extremist Content Online

HE Emmanuel Macron
President of France

Dame Jacinda Ardern
New Zealand Prime Minister's Special Envoy for the Christchurch Call

Your Excellencies,

You noted in the joint statement of the 2022 Christchurch Call Leaders' Meeting that addressing disinformation, harassment, abuse, and hatred online is critical to future-proofing the Christchurch Call. Understanding how terrorist, violent, and extremist content proliferates and influences online is central to humanity's existential challenges in many areas, including systemic inequalities, climate change, and increased political polarization.

We agree. To address these major existential challenges, we need to better understand their origins including whether these phenomena are seeded online. We are interested specifically in determining whether malevolent actors share tactics, trade illegal materials, and organize themselves to perpetrate large-scale harms. One of the natural pathways to countering terrorism and violent extremist content (TVEC) online is to **study the links between forms of hate (such as misogyny, antisemitism, Islamophobia, incel rhetoric and white supremacy online) and terrorist and violent acts offline**. We are of the view that it is critical to address how TVEC has real life consequences so that we identify proper interventions, including accountability for how they utilize the online space that is currently essential to their operations. Evidence from such studies might help support interventions to counter potential violence by at least monitoring, if not regulating, the degree of TVEC online.

We thus seek your support <u>to establish a working group of interdisciplinary academic experts under the auspices of the Christchurch Call</u> to develop and engage in this critical research and report upon its findings on an ongoing basis. We propose that the working group's remit include the following:

1. **Understand the behaviors and demographics of actors** before they commit mass acts of violence offline. For example, besides posting their manifestos online, did they engage in online harassment and stalking offline before committing mass murder? Is there evidence of perpetrators using fringe platforms to "practice" before engaging in mainstream media, if at all? We know online culture and radicalization intersect. Understanding how they do through research evidence will help inoculate against radicalization and indoctrination online.

2. Evaluate the degree of **intersectional harassment and abuse** that might precede violent acts. For example, Twitter's (now "X's") "Hateful Conduct Policy" introduced in 2018, protected individuals when they had been dehumanized due to "membership in an identifiable group". This fails to protect persons having multiple identities and/or belonging to two or more groups, as highlighted recently by Glitch, a former institutional member of Twitter's Trust and Safety Council. Glitch's Digital Misogynoir Report documents how sexist and racist tropes about Black women are the basis for new forms of harassment on social media. The report coins the term "Misogynoir, [or the] 'particular venom directed at Black women', to acknowledge the ways Black women are uniquely discriminated against because of their gender and race."

Groups that have historically been physically harassed and targeted because of their caste, gender, sexual orientation, class, religious identity and/or intersections of these continue to be victims on social media.[1] There is thus a need to examine how ideological and terrorist violence occurs by interrogating physical and sexual violence that is conventionally not included in studies of extremism.[2] The working group could look into possible interventions to counter potential violence by assessing the degree to which violent acts are associated with intersectional harassment and abuse.

We thank you for your consideration of our proposal. Key members from the signatory list below are ready to provide clarifications and/or to help you form a broad coalition of interdisciplinary researchers to facilitate these analyses.

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Signatories (by alphabetical order)

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[1]   Banerji, S. and Bhat, R. (2022), Social Media and Hate. LSE Blog: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2023/08/02/a-hierarchy-of-hate/.
[2]   DiBranco, A. February 10, 2022. Male Supremacist Terrorism as a Rising Threat. https://web.archive.org/web/20230130231507/https://icct.nl/publication/male-supremacist-terrorism-as-a-rising-threat/

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