

CHANGE THE TERMS

REDUCING HATE ONLINE

September 2, 2020

Mark Zuckerberg, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

The Change the Terms coalition, which includes over 60 civil rights, human rights, technology policy and consumer protection organizations working to stop online hate, writes to express our deep concern about the self-described militia organized on the Kenosha Guard Facebook page and their event, “Armed Citizens to Protect our Lives and Property,” which was coordinated as a “call to arms” in response to the protests spurred by the police shooting of Jacob Blake.¹ At that event, two protesters were murdered by a 17-year-old white male armed with an AR-15.

As you later recognized, but only after lives were lost, the Kenosha Guard Facebook page was in plain violation of Facebook’s new rule against “Dangerous Individuals and Organizations.” Its corresponding event also violated Facebook’s policy against events that encourage people to bring weapons. As we have raised many times with you and your staff, and this tragedy illustrates once more, you must do more to stop violent groups from using your tools - and especially event pages - to recruit, fundraise, and orchestrate violence.

Facebook’s inaction in the face of prolific user flags is shocking and unacceptable. The Kenosha Guard Facebook page was flagged 455 times to Facebook moderators, making up 66 percent of all events reported that day,² with four manual reviews occurring in addition to the automated ones, only to be deemed in compliance with Facebook’s policies.”³ By the time Facebook removed the Kenosha Guard Facebook page, it had grown to 3,000 members.⁴ One user who

¹ Brandom, R., Facebook takes down ‘call to arms’ event after two shot dead in Kenosha. *The Verge*, Aug. 26, 2020, <https://www.theverge.com/2020/8/26/21402571/kenosha-guard-shooting-facebook-deplatforming-militia-violence>.

² Mac, R., A Kenosha Militia Facebook Event Asking Attendees To Bring Weapons Was Reported 455 Times. Moderators Said It Didn’t Violate Any Rules, *BuzzFeed News*, Aug. 28, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/kenosha-militia-facebook-reported-455-times-moderator>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *See supra*, n.1.

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reported the event before the protest witnessed “[p]eople talking about being ‘locked and loaded’” and multiple people asking what types of weapons to bring, with other group members responding to “bring everything.”⁵ Facebook moderators concluded the event did not violate its policies despite these clear calls to arms.⁶ When another user flagged group comments about putting “nails in the tires of protestors’ cars,” Facebook responded that the comments were permissible content under current policies.⁷

You reportedly stated that Facebook missed the page “because the complaints had been sent to content moderation contractors who were not versed in ‘how certain militias’ operate,”⁸ calling it an “operational mistake.” This response is woefully understated and inadequate.

Over the years our organizations have repeatedly warned Facebook about how white supremacists, conspiracy theorists and militia groups are using your events pages to organize armed protests and rallies that lead to real world death and violence. We have seen this over and over again in front of houses of worship including hate groups organizing armed protests outside of mosques around the country, and in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the white supremacist Unite the Right rally organized on Facebook ended in Heather Heyer’s murder. What happened in Kenosha is no anomaly. It was foreseeable because it has happened before. You have consistently failed to act with the level of urgency consistent with these threats. That isn’t an operational mistake - that’s a design defect.

We call on you to take the following actions to prevent Facebook from being used to incite violence:

- Conduct and publicly release a full investigation into your failure to enforce the recent policy on “Dangerous Individuals and Organizations”⁹ and your policy against calls to arms.
- Clarify publically whether the Kenosha shooter had received the page and/or event information algorithmically prompted to him, or whether he was invited to the event by a person.

⁵ Brandom, R., Facebook chose not to act on militia complaints before Kenosha shooting, *The Verge*, Aug. 26, 2020, <https://www.theverge.com/2020/8/26/21403004/facebook-kenosha-militia-groups-shooting-blm-protest>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *See supra*, n.1.

⁸ *See supra*, n.2.

⁹ *Id.*

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- Build tools to systematically increase the proactive enforcement of your rules, including detection of event pages that promote violence, and stop relying on the victims of hate speech and violent speech to flag violations. Prioritize rapid review of event pages flagged by users in this category, especially those belonging to known white supremacist and militia groups.
- Take accountability for your design failure, rather than trying to pass the blame onto underpaid contractors who are doing a difficult job with insufficient support.
- Provide a public description of the training content moderators receive to accurately identify and understand the inner workings of militias.
- Ensure all content moderators receive adequate training on militia content and patterns, including the violent threat the groups pose to the general public, or at least ensure proper routing of complaints.
- Monitor spikes in feedback reports for events, and trigger an investigation immediately, as suggested by a Facebook employee, “given this has proved to be a good signal for imminent harm.”¹⁰
- Conduct and publicly release a broad investigation into the ways in which the design of your products—including groups and event pages—are being used to incite, glorify, organize, and perpetrate violence by white supremacists, militias and violent misogynist groups.
- Adopt the “Recommended Internet Company Corporate Policies and Terms of Service to Reduce Hateful Activities” authored by the Change the Terms coalition,¹¹ to include a ban on hateful activities, better enforcement of your existing policies, and more accountability for injecting human and civil rights into content moderation decisions at the C-suite and Board of Directors level.
- Unequivocally ban all hate groups, white supremacist militia groups, violent misogynist groups, and event pages that encourage people to bring weapons to events.

¹⁰ See *supra*, n.2.

¹¹ Change the Terms, Recommended Internet Company Corporate Policies and Terms of Service to Reduce Hateful Activities, https://assets.website-files.com/5bba6f4828dfc3686095bf6b/5bd0e36186e28d35874f0909_Recommended%20Internet%20Company%20Corporate%20Policies%20%20Terms%20of%20Service_final-10-24.pdf.

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We cannot stress enough the urgency of our requests. Just last weekend yet another violent event organized on your platform took place in Portland, Oregon.¹² A post pinned to an event page, which drew some 2,500 attendees, encouraged attendees to "conceal carry" their weapons. Violence erupted when the Facebook event participants swept through town, some firing on protesters with paintball guns and pepper spray. Private Facebook groups and event pages also have been used to spread disinformation, organize armed protests, and direct countless violent misogynist threats at a female governor.¹³ These types of events have a chilling effect on peaceful protest, free speech, and public safety.

You have the power to save lives and significantly influence the health of our democracy. We hope to meet with you soon to discuss your plans to put that power to good use.

Sincerely,

The Change the Terms Coalition¹⁴

¹² Facebook Event, "Trump Cruise Route," Aug. 29, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/events/d41d8cd9/trump-2020-cruise-rally-in-portland/658770928063041/>.

¹³ S. Neavling, Gov. Whitmer becomes target of dozens of threats on private Facebook groups ahead of armed rally in Lansing, *Detroit Metro Times*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.metrotimes.com/news-hits/archives/2020/05/11/whitmer-becomes-target-of-dozens-of-threats-on-private-facebook-groups-ahead-of-armed-rally-in-lansing>

¹⁴ To view a full list of Change the Terms member organizations please visit <https://www.changethetheems.org/coalition>.