

May 8, 2023

Open letter to News Media and Policy Makers re: Tech Experts from the Global Majority

Dear News Media and Policy Makers:

We, the undersigned, women and non-binary people of the global majority working on the frontlines of artificial intelligence and technology policy, invite news media and policymakers to expand their coverage of the challenges arising from digital technology, tap into our collective knowledge and expand the pool of sought-after experts on these issues.

For far too long media coverage of the threats and risks of technology has been defined by tech CEOs and their public relations departments. Meanwhile, the harms of these technologies continue to disproportionately fall on the communities of which we are a part. At the same time, policy makers globally are struggling to keep pace with technological developments and effectively defend people from the excesses of powerful tech barons.

Women and non-binary people from across the global majority consistently raise concerns about the ways that technology is harming our communities despite great personal and professional risk. We've [examined](#) the way technology, and AI in particular, has undermined democracy and harmed historically oppressed communities, such as women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged people across the world. We've [written books](#), [taken on oppressive regimes](#) with courageous reporting, [blown the whistle](#) on some of the biggest tech companies of our time, conducted quantitative and participatory [research](#), organized anti-hate [campaigns](#) that have increased public [scrutiny](#) of tech firms, and more. For these and other positions we have lost professional and personal opportunities, with some of us being forced into exile for speaking out against oppressive regimes.

We've experienced firsthand the impacts when AI systems are used to discriminate against us, when tech companies try to silence us, when hate and harassment campaigns target us, and when governments exploit technology to surveil and oppress us.

Yet, in consultations about what risks and challenges new technologies present we remain marginalized. Because we discuss real and present danger and not science fiction, our concerns are presented as negligible. Meanwhile, former executives at tech companies become fly-by-night activists even after profiting from the systems they created, which have further entrenched their companies atop the global economy.

Last week Dr. Geoffrey Hinton quit Google and issued grave warnings about the risk of digital intelligence. He was met with robust media coverage dubbing him the “godfather of AI” and requests for meetings and guidance from policymakers and tech CEOs alike. In a CNN interview, when asked about other whistleblowers like Dr. Timnit Gebru, Hinton claimed that Gebru’s concerns aren’t as “existential” as the ones he’s raising.

We reject the premise that only wealthy white men get to decide what constitutes an existential threat to society, and we call on policymakers and news media to diversify their sources. For people of color, women, LGBTQIA+ people, religious and caste minorities, indigenous people, migrants and other marginalized communities, technology has always posed an existential threat, it has repeatedly been harnessed to ensure our inferiority in societal power structures.

Hinton’s remarks are but the latest in a long, global history of ignoring the alarms sounded by anyone who is not a masculine tech executive. We allow these narrow perceptions of risk to set the terms of the debate about AI. For refugees losing the right to asylum because of entrenched racism in border management, the present risks are existential. For people losing access to vital financial services because of encoded bias the risk is existential. The closed networks these men represent cannot fully define the problem, and they do not have all the solutions.

We urge you to actively engage our deep expertise. More importantly, we request that you seek guidance from the communities most negatively impacted by technology and AI as a critical foundational step to deepen understanding and accountability. We have committed our lives to ensuring that digital technology is a force for justice, democracy and liberation, and not a tool for oppression. Are you with us?

Sincerely,

Rosemary Ajayi, Founder of Digital Africa Research Lab (DigiAfricaLab)

Esra’a Al Shafei, Founder and Executive Director, Majal.org. Board Member at the Wikimedia Foundation and Tor Project

Htaike Htaike Aung, Digital Rights Activist , Myanmar Internet Project

Dr. Sasha Costanza-Chock, Northeastern University Associate Professor, Author of Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need

Nighat Dad, Founder and Executive Director Digital Rights Foundation

Marianne Díaz Hernández, digital rights activist and researcher, #WhyID Campaigner at Access Now

Dr. Timnit Gebru, Founder and Executive Director, Distributed Artificial Intelligence Research Institute (DAIR)

Arzu Geybulla, Journalist, Founder Azerbaijan Internet Watch

Jessica J. González, co-CEO of Free Press, co-founder of Change the Terms, Stop Hate for Profit and Stop Toxic Twitter

Jac sm Kee, Feminist tech activist, Co-founder and Director, Numun Fund

Libby Liu, CEO of Whistleblower Aid, creator of the Open Technology Fund

Dr. Safiya U. Noble, UCLA Professor, Author of Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism, MacArthur Fellow, and Founder of the Center on Race and Digital Justice

Nanjala Nyabola, Writer and Political Scientist, Independent

Paola Ricaurte, Tecnológico de Monterrey Associate Professor; Faculty Associate, Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society; Co-founder Tierra Común Network; LAC Hub leader, Feminist AI Research Network, f<A+i>r

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Executive Director, Equality Labs

Joana Varon, Founder and Executive Directress of Coding Rights; Researcher affiliated to the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University; Member of the Feminist AI Research Network - f<A+i>r