

May, 09, 2019

Open Letter from Survivors of Misinformation to Facebook, Twitter, Google, Youtube, and Whatsapp

To the titans of social media:

We write to you as survivors of malicious misinformation campaigns. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us almost lost our lives. All of us have been attacked and hurt by the viral lies that are still spreading on your social network.

We have come together from different corners of the world to say: Enough.

We believe you when you say you care about building the world we all want. The first step in that journey is working together to stop the malicious misinformation that today poisons people's experiences on your platforms.

We have met your executives, but now we want to meet you face to face.

It is hard to put the pain we have all endured into words, but we'll try to give you a picture of what some of us have been through.

As civil society leaders from the Rohingya community in Myanmar, **I, Tun Khin, and I, Aung Kyaw Moe**, watched as our country descended into ethnic cleansing and murderous violence - with thousands upon thousands of innocent victims burned, hatched and raped to death. Much of the hate and fear festered on social media platforms - and although Facebook has moved forward on fighting hate speech - disinformation remains equally as dangerous. This status quo is not stable - and we watch in fear for our community and our families, as we see the possibility of renewed violence.

I, Tim Jacks, had to see my daughter Maggie isolated in our home instead of leaving on a long-expected vacation during her leukemia treatment. She was exposed to measles during a routine clinic visit, and for weeks we waited for evidence that she had contacted this terrible illness. Thanks to the poor choices of parents who are the target of misinformation around vaccination, my daughter was denied a chance to briefly live a normal life during her time as a cancer patient.

I, Lenny Pozner, lost my beautiful 6-year old son Noah during the Sandy Hook shooting. That pain alone was unfathomable, yet I and my family were forced to relive that pain as viral fake news stories and hoaxes on Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram claimed we were actors who had staged the death of our own son. I founded the HONR Network, which supports the victims of mass casualty violence as well as the targets of online hate speech and harassment. These hateful lies need to stop.

I, **Jean Wyllys**, an elected MP from Brazil, had to flee my country and give up on my mandate because of serious death threats aimed at me and my family. The threats were motivated by fake news largely spread on social media, claiming, among other things, that I was a pedophile trying to impose “mandatory homosexuality”.

I, **Ethan Lindenberg**, and my siblings were never vaccinated because anti-vaxx disinformation continues to swamp my parents’ newsfeed, confusing my family’s decision-making. My mother loves me, she cares deeply for our family, but she is a target of disinformation pages that are designed to misinform her and fill her with fear - putting us all at risk. I have testified in front of the United States Senate - but I am coming to realise that nobody can solve this problem as fast as you can.

I, **Jessikka Aro**, decided to defend my country’s freedom. As a journalist, I investigated Russian troll farms and the spread of disinformation attacking my nation. Although my work has been celebrated internationally, I am now a constant victim of disinformation, death threats and harassment on your platform. From being called an agent, to being accused of being a criminal NATO drug-dealer, I am being attacked. But this is not just about me: all of Europe, the US and many other regions are under threat, and as a journalist, it strikes me how little you are doing to protect free citizens and democracies.

When we listen to you talk about disinformation - **we hear you speak about numbers, bots, AI and election integrity. But we never hear anyone speak about the real human costs of this problem.** We are just the tip of the iceberg. There are many more victims like us.

You couldn’t protect us, but you can protect others.

And we have a number of ideas to help. Why don’t you send corrections to every person exposed to malicious disinformation? Why don’t you continue to detox your algorithms to make them less focused on likes and addictive content, and more focused on positive connections and accurate information?

Key elections are approaching around the world, creating a toxic political ecosystem where extremists are using your platforms to polarise our democracies - and people like us are paying the highest price.

How much more pain, death and suffering will it take for you to clean up your social platforms and defend us all against disinformation?

It can end here.

It has to end here.

Your legacy will be defined by how you respond to this challenge. We’re willing to help you and work with you to fix this problem. And we won’t give up until you take action and correct the record.

In Hope and Determination,

Survivors of Disinformation

Jesikka Aro, Finland

Tim Jacks, USA

Tun Khin, Myanmar

Aung Kyaw, Myanmar

Ethan Lindenberg, USA

Lenny Pozner, USA

Jean Wyllys, Brazil