

March 1, 2019

Honorable Ed Markey
United States Senate
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

Thank you for your letter of February 21, 2019, regarding how Facebook approaches designations of groups engaged in violent activities.

There is no place on Facebook for organizations or individuals that proclaim a violent mission or are engaged in violence. We classify these groups as dangerous organizations which includes groups that engage in terrorist activity, organized hate, mass or serial murder, human trafficking, organized violence or criminal activity. Our policies against dangerous organizations are detailed in our publicly available Community Standards. Our definitional approach, which has been informed by academic research and international law, is based on the behavior of the organizations and individuals — not their political objectives, or the nature of their enemies.

With that context in mind, below please find answers to your specific questions:

1.) Why did Facebook designate the Arakan Army, MNDAA, KIA, and TNLA as violent organizations, but not the Burmese military, the Burmese government, or other ethnic armed groups?

Generally speaking, we are focused on non-state actors. We are circumspect about Facebook's authority to determine when military forces of a government should no longer be given deference as sovereign authority, particularly when the international community writ large continues to recognize the sovereignty of the government itself.

However, we recognize that the situation in Myanmar is unique, and we have taken steps to ban members of the military from Facebook, and we continue to evaluate our policies around violence committed by both state and non-state actors.

In 2017, for example, we designated the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. In 2018, we banned 20 individuals and organizations from Facebook in Myanmar including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and the military's Myawady television network. We began our investigation into the Arakan Army, MNDAA, KIA and TNLA because of an uptick in violence in the country and our investigation revealed that these groups met our definition of dangerous organizations. These groups were designated in February. Our investigations into armed groups in Myanmar are ongoing and are not limited to these four groups. If we determine that additional groups meet our criteria for designation, then we will take appropriate action.

2.) Does the designation of the aforementioned ethnic armed groups as violent organizations, but not the Burmese military, reflect support for the Burmese government in the country's civil war?

No. This action was taken based on our Community Standards and our efforts to keep violent and dangerous organizations off our services. This policy is public and available to read in our Community Standards. Our definition of dangerous organizations is based on the *behavior* of the organizations and individuals—not their political objectives, or the nature of their enemies. We take this approach so that we can maintain a consistent policy globally while minimizing the use of our platform to support violence. In Myanmar, we have taken steps to disrupt the online activity of dangerous organizations and individuals, from all sides of the conflict. This includes (but is not limited to) banning ARSA, Wirathu Ma Ba Tha, BDPF, and several members of the military.

3.) Who at Facebook made the ultimate decision to ban these pages? And who was involved in the decision-making process within the organization?

We have a Dangerous Organizations team, which works closely with several policy teams across the company to make decisions that affect how our services are used in Myanmar. This team includes Myanmar experts and experts in counter terrorism.

4.) Numerous civil society groups stated that Facebook did not consult with them before the decision to ban the pages. Before making this decision, did Facebook connect with local activist within Burma who are documenting and analyzing hate speech on the platform? If yes, please name all parties consulted and describe the nature of this consultation. If no, why not?

Yes, before we made our decision, we spoke with local activists and political experts in Myanmar who document and analyze hate speech on the platform. We also spoke with international peace and conflict experts and historians before our enforcement decision. We do not have permission to disclose their information. It should be noted that disclosure of the identities of these activists raise significant safety and security concerns. We also consulted local and international peace and conflict advisors in person and through remote phone calls.

5.) Many civil society activists as well as others who are outspoken on issues of human rights are facing threats both offline and online — including through Facebook. How is Facebook addressing the security of these activists?

Keeping our community safe, especially populations who may be at risk, is our top priority. We have long-standing policies against threats of violence and will remove any content or accounts that violate these policies. This includes content and accounts that were reported to us from civil society organizations and human rights groups. We have also invested heavily in people and technology to help us better identify content that violates our policies

before it is reported to us, and to remove people and organizations who repeatedly break our rules. We recognize that certain individuals and groups may be more vulnerable than others. We account for this with our credible violence policy and extend greater protection to vulnerable people, among which we include civil society activists. And in 2017, we announced new tools to prevent harassment on Facebook and in Messenger, based on feedback from organizations representing groups who disproportionately experience harassment like civil society activists. Finally, we often conduct risk assessments to evaluate partner safety and maintain relationships with international NGOs who specialize in providing offline assistance to at-risk activists.

6.) How many Burmese translators do you currently have on your staff? Of the number of Burmese translators that you have, do any of these employees come from non-Bamar ethnic groups? If so, how many?

As of the end of 2018, we had over 100 native Burmese content reviewers, and have the ability to review content in ethnic languages as well. Our content reviewers are based across time zones, to ensure we are able to respond to reports 24/7.

7.) What is Facebook doing to identify other countries at risk of atrocities and develop locally informed strategies to ensure that Facebook is not implicated in future human rights violations elsewhere?

In 2018, we developed dedicated teams to better understand the role of Facebook in countries where the abuse of our platform may contribute to social conflict and violence. Examples of efforts led by these teams have included reviewing our policies and protocols, making product improvements, evaluating policy enforcement and operations, implementing on-the-ground programs with civil society organizations and NGOs, and building relationships with international human rights experts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to answer these questions. Given the inherent difficulty and complexity of the issues you've raised, we would be happy to offer you and your staff a more substantive briefing by a member of the Dangerous Organizations team mentioned above to talk through how we approach these matters.

Sincerely,



Kevin Martin
Vice President, U.S. Public Policy