



December 29, 2016

Dear concerned advocates and citizens:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of October 31, 2016. Our mission at Facebook is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. We work hard to be inclusive of all perspectives and viewpoints, including those from marginalized communities, and we aim to give voice to individuals and communities through products like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

Every day, people around the world share billions of things on Facebook that add value to our lives—from news to family photos to political commentary to inspiring videos. But sometimes people share content that can be abusive or harmful to the rest of the community. We created our [Community Standards](#) to find the right balance between giving people a place to express themselves and promoting a welcoming and safe environment for everyone. Under our Community Standards, for example, we remove credible threats of physical harm to individuals and we also remove specific threats of theft, vandalism, or other financial harm. Our goal is to create an environment where we don't need many rules, and people on Facebook feel motivated and empowered to treat each other with empathy and respect.

As we [said](#) last month, we also want to allow content—including photos and videos—that “people find newsworthy, significant, or important to the public interest—*even if they might otherwise violate our standards.*” We are working with our community and partners to explore how to do this in fair and practical ways, both through innovative tools and approaches to enforcement. Our intent is to allow more images and stories without posing safety risks or showing graphic images to minors and others who do not want to see them.

To implement these standards, we look to the community of people on Facebook to report abusive content. Whenever someone—including law enforcement representatives—reports content to us for violating our Community Standards, we review it to see if it violates our Community Standards and act accordingly. If the content does not violate our standards, we do not remove it; if it does violate our standards, we remove it regardless of who brought it to our attention.

Our team processes millions of reports of abuse each week, and we sometimes get things wrong. When we do, we work hard to correct those mistakes. We take every error seriously and we appreciate it when you and others in the community draw our attention to these issues, as this information helps us to improve our policies and processes for the community at large.

We do not remove content simply because police ask us to, nor do we remove content simply because it depicts or describes an encounter with the police. Transparency around police encounters is an important social issue, and people have shared such footage on Facebook many times over the years. We recognize that Facebook Live video is particularly important to many people in the Facebook community and beyond; it allows us to see what is happening in the world as it occurs.

Sometimes government authorities seek to compel us to remove content that doesn't violate our Community Standards, but that authorities believe violates some law. In such cases, our policy is to push back to make sure the government demands are both lawful and necessary. If we are required to block content prohibited under one country's laws, we will allow that content in the rest of the world so that the impact of government restrictions on sharing and communication is minimized. We also work to expose how governments restrict what people share, and that's why we publish a semiannual [Global Government Requests Report](#), which provides detailed information about the demands governments make on us and how we respond to those demands.

With this as background, I would also like to address your specific recommendations:

1. You ask that we “make policies about how Facebook makes decisions to censor content clear and accessible to the public,” provide the “operating details of the law enforcement request portal,” and “release to the public basic data on all user censorship.” We are always looking for ways to enhance transparency about government requests, and we welcome additional feedback about how we can be more transparent to communities interested in these issues. This letter is one part of our efforts to improve transparency. We do currently publicly disclose our detailed [Guidelines for Law Enforcement Authorities](#), and we publish detailed data about government requests twice a year in our [Government Requests Report](#). This report provides detailed data on a country-by-country level, as well as a “Frequently Asked Questions” section and an “About the Report” section that explain what this data means and how to interpret it.
2. You urge us to “create a public appeals platform where users can appeal content censored by Facebook.” When governments compel Facebook to block content, we seek to provide notice to the user who created that content so that they can appeal to relevant legal authorities or otherwise publicize the issue should they choose to do so. For enforcement actions pursuant to Facebook’s own Community Standards, we provide impacted users with the ability to appeal account-level restrictions—such as account deletion and suspension—in most cases, and we are exploring ways to improve our enforcement accuracy and accountability. We welcome your continued input on these issues.
3. You urge us to “undergo an external audit on the equity and human rights outcomes of your Facebook Live and content censorship and data sharing policies.” We recently underwent an independent external assessment of our compliance with human rights principles—specifically, freedom of expression, privacy, and responsible company decision-making—pursuant to our membership in the [Global Network Initiative](#) (“the GNI”), and we were found to be fully compliant. Launched in 2008, the GNI is a multi-stakeholder forum bringing together companies, civil society organizations, academics, and socially responsible investors from around the world to protect and advance freedom of expression and privacy. As part of the GNI’s biannual assessment process, the GNI Board—which includes representatives from civil society, academia, socially responsible investors, and other companies—carefully reviews the findings of an independent, confidential assessment of each member company’s practices, policies, and procedures. For more information, please see the GNI [Public Report on the 2015/2016 Independent Company Assessments](#).
4. You recommend that we “refuse to disclose customer content and data to third party agencies unless required to by law.” We take the protection of people’s information very seriously, and maintaining trust in our relationship with the 1.8 billion people who use Facebook is a company-wide focus. We offer meaningful privacy controls so that our users can manage the information they share on Facebook. We have an industry-leading internal privacy program that reviews our products and features before launch. We have developed new tools to help empower people to customize their privacy settings when they use Facebook. For example, [Privacy Checkup](#) allows users to review with whom they are sharing information. Additionally, our Privacy and Security Basics is an interactive, visual guide to privacy and security controls on Facebook. It helps people understand how to change settings to make sure they’re sharing information with the people they want. We may disclose data to third parties when users consent to such a transfer, including when it is needed to enable features like social login. With regard to disclosing data to law enforcement, we detail our rigorous policies in our [Guidelines for Law Enforcement Authorities](#), and we publish detailed data about government requests twice a year in our [Government Requests Report](#).

We truly appreciate and welcome your feedback. I hope that this letter reassures you that we are committed to respecting everyone who uses Facebook—regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, or other characteristic. We believe that the services we provide can be powerful tools for people and communities around the world, whether they are seeking to connect with friends and family, shining a light on issues of deep public interest, or learning about what's happening in their neighborhood. We will continue to face challenges as we pursue our mission of making the world more open and connected, and we are inspired by the remarkable work of so many members of our community of users. We look forward to continuing to discuss these challenges with you and receiving your valuable feedback in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J.D. Kaplan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joel D. Kaplan  
Vice President, Global Public Policy