Open Letter to Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

We understand it’s not easy keeping 2 billion members happy, much less shouldering the weight for all the nasty things they might say to one another. We genuinely appreciate all the good social media can accomplish: the personal connections, the charity drives, the human compassion, the teachable moments.

What we don’t understand is hypocrisy. We don’t understand the failure to step up when given an opportunity to do the right thing -- and to refuse to enable the wrong thing.

In your own words, you do “not allow hate speech on Facebook because it creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion and in some cases may promote real-world violence.” As we have seen in recent research, there is a direct correlation between social media and hate and violence. When someone posts something hateful, there is a corresponding increase in race-related violence. It’s astonishing the power Facebook posts wield!

You yourself “define hate speech as a direct attack on people based on what we call protected characteristics – race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation.... We define attack as violent or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, or calls for exclusion or segregation.”

Some say that would compromise free speech. We actually value the principles of individual liberty, until that moment when someone is foreseeably harmed by those words. Holocaust denial is dehumanizing and attacks people based on religious affiliation. It is hate speech. We urge you to take immediate action to stop the spread of Holocaust denial across your platform.

A month ago, we wrote to you directly offering to work together to tackle hate speech on your site. We’re not even asking you to proactively promote education, or to advocate for a better-informed public. We’re not asking you to endorse the hundreds of Holocaust education organizations that teach about the perils of intolerance, discrimination, injustice, and hatred.

We simply want you to abide by your own policy of not allowing hate speech on Facebook, and to own up to your moral responsibility to support a fact-based account of history.

Close to 200,000 people from all around the world have signed our petition asking for you to step up. When you host Holocaust denial groups, you are spreading lies and untruths. This hatred and anti-Semitism casts doubt on facts and incites violence against human beings.

We know you can do this. We have witnessed your admirable attempts to curtail hate speech in places like Myanmar. Be consistent! Hate speech = violence. You have a responsibility to make a safe space for those who interact with your billions of users -- not to be complicit in inciting violence against anyone.

Thank you,
Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect