

U.S. GOVERNMENT REMARKS

Leaders Dialogue: Strategic Responses to Terrorist and Violent Extremist Narratives

23 September 2019

16:30-18:00, Conference Room 1, UNHQ

The United States stands with the international community in condemning terrorist content online in the strongest terms.

We take very seriously the need to counter terrorists' ability to recruit and radicalize or inspire others to terrorism. We are committed to a whole-of-society, comprehensive approach to countering terrorist threats effectively and responsibly, while remaining consistent with the U.S. Constitution, our guiding principles, and international law.

The horrific terrorist attacks against mosques in Christchurch—as well as recent attacks in the United States—speak to the power, influence, and lethality of terrorism, no matter what corrupt ideology is claimed by perpetrators. The mosque attacks in Christchurch were a powerful reminder to all of us that terrorism knows no bounds, holds no one ideology, and no part of the world is immune from its unacceptable and repugnant expression of hate. Americans know all too well the pain of such attacks, as we have seen in Pittsburgh, El Paso, and Dayton—to name a few.

While the U.S. government is not in a position to endorse the *Christchurch Call to Action* due to several legal and policy concerns, we support the overall goals reflected in that document. For example, we agree that we must ensure we are working collectively—across industry, governments and civil society—to address the use of the Internet to amplify a crisis—such as a terrorist attack—in a coordinated and systematic way, and we applaud efforts already underway to achieve this. And we will continue to work with our partners to defeat terrorism online.

The United States continues to engage governments, industry, and civil society to counter the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes. This is most recently illustrated by our endorsement of the *G20 Osaka Leaders' Statement* and the *G7 Biarritz Strategy for an Open, Free and Secure Digital Transformation*. Our commitment on these issues is also seen in our co-sponsoring with the Kingdom of

Jordan the *first* Aqaba Process Tech Meeting with companies, civil society organizations, and foreign partners earlier this year.

U.S. policy remains unchanged and consistent with our long-standing guiding principles:

First, the United States collaborates with technology companies and strives to improve the voluntary and regular information sharing between governments and companies—for example, on U.S. designated terrorists. We encourage technology companies to enforce their terms of service and community standards that forbid the use of their platforms for terrorist purposes. While much remains to be done, we are seeing progress. We applaud the efforts being made by the industry-led *Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism* and UN-affiliated *Tech Against Terrorism* in this regard, especially their efforts to further develop and use technology and research to address terrorist content online and to share knowledge with smaller companies. And we stand ready to support these efforts as a member of the new GIFCT *Independent Advisory Committee*.

Second, we are proactive in efforts to counter terrorist content online, while also respecting freedom of expression. U.S. law enforcement officials will not seek to compel the removal of online content by technology companies unless it clearly violates U.S. law (for example, child pornography or online illicit drug markets). Content that promotes an ideology or belief alone does not typically constitute a violation of U.S. law, and is generally protected as free speech by the U.S. Constitution.

Third, we maintain that the most effective means to counter terrorist speech is not through censorship, but through counter-speech that promotes tolerance. Thus, we emphasize the importance of promoting credible, alternative narratives as the primary means by which we can undermine and defeat terrorist messaging. Working with civil society, companies, and communities to spread voices of tolerance and inclusion is critical to our effort. We also recognize that banning offensive speech can be counter-productive by raising its profile and forcing it into darker places—such government overreach can actually undermine counterterrorism efforts.

Sometimes in response to legitimate concerns, other countries have taken different approaches to Internet governance. Some argue that if we had more restrictive laws in place, these issues would be more easily resolved. From our perspective,

it's not clear that restrictive laws will do anything but constrain growth and innovation, and make the Internet less free and less open.

In conclusion, we must not let our efforts to address the problem of terrorist content online put at risk our commitment to the freedom of speech and expression. Nor should we jeopardize the open, interoperable, reliable, and secure internet we seek to preserve and expand as an engine of commerce and innovation. We remain open to considering all options that will help us address these challenges effectively, responsibly, and consistent with our values, including our constitutional protections for speech and international human rights obligations on freedom of expression.