

October 30, 2017

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg, Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg and Ms. Sandberg,

We, the undersigned civil rights, interfaith, and advocacy organizations write to express our deep concern regarding ads, pages, and hateful content on your platform used to divide our country, and in particular, to promote anti-Muslim, anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and anti-LGBTQ animus. We thank you for recent meetings with some of our organizations representing communities that were directly affected by the material on your platform. We appreciate that senior members of your team—including you, Ms. Sandberg—have facilitated these meetings, and we hope that these conversations are the beginning of a serious and ongoing dialogue. Now, it is necessary for Facebook to take critical steps to address the bigotry and discrimination generated on your platform.

As you know, we do not yet have access to all the divisive content targeting communities we represent; therefore, we are only able to cite to the few examples that were leaked to the media.

For example, Russian operatives set up misleading accounts impersonating or posing as American individuals and groups on Facebook to promote Russian propaganda during the American election season. Reports indicate that a Russian Facebook account called “SecuredBorders” posed as a group of US citizens concerned about the increased number of refugees in America. This fake account not only promoted anti-immigrant messaging online, but also managed to organize an in-person anti-refugee rally in Twin Falls, Idaho in August 2016.¹

In addition, a Facebook page entitled “United Muslims of America” was an imposter account traced back to Russia²—the real United Muslims of America is a California-based interfaith organization working at the local level to promote dialogue and political participation.³ The imposter account smeared political candidates and

¹ Geoffrey Smith, “Russia Orchestrated Anti-Immigrant Rallies in the U.S. via Facebook Last Year,” *Fortune*, Sept. 12, 2017, *available at* <http://fortune.com/2017/09/12/russia-orchestrated-anti-immigrant-rallies-in-the-u-s-via-facebook-last-year/>.

² Dean Obeidallah, “How Russian Hackers Used My Face to Sabotage Our Politics and Elect Trump,” *The Daily Beast*, Sept. 27, 2017, *available at* <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-russian-hackers-used-my-face-to-sabotage-our-politics-and-elect-trump>.

³ United Muslims of America “About” page, *available at* <http://www.umamet.org/about-us>.

promoted political rallies aimed at Muslim audiences.⁴ In another example, the Internet Research Agency in Russia promoted an anti-Muslim rally thousands of miles away in Houston, Texas where individuals protested outside of a mosque.⁵ Additional reports indicate that Facebook offered its expertise to a bigoted advocacy group by creating a case study testing different video formats, and advising on how to enhance the reach of the group's anti-refugee campaign in swing states during the final weeks of the 2016 election.⁶ These examples of content on Facebook were not only harmful, but also used to rile up supporters of President Trump.

Furthermore, it has been reported that Russian operatives purchased Facebook ads about Black Lives Matter—some impersonating the group and others describing it as a threat.⁷ This included ads that were directly targeted to reach audiences in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland. CNN reports that the Russian Internet Research Agency used these ads in an attempt to amplify political discord and create a general atmosphere of incivility and chaos.⁸ This included a fake ad containing an image of an African-American woman dry-firing a rifle, playing on the worst stereotypes regarding African-Americans as threatening or violent.⁹

We were alarmed to see your platform being abused to promote bigotry, and especially disappointed that it has taken media exposure and congressional oversight to give a degree of transparency into your practices. It is important to keep in mind that pervasive bigotry has long existed on your platform, and the Russian operatives

⁴ Obeiallah, *supra* note 1.

⁵ Tim Lister & Clare Sebastian, "Stoking Islamophobia and secession in Texas - from an office in Russia," CNN Politics, Oct. 6, 2017, *available at* <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/05/politics/heart-of-texas-russia-event/index.html>.

⁶ Melanie Ehrenkranz, "Facebook Reportedly Used Anti-Muslim Ad as Test Case in Video Formats," Gizmodo, Oct. 18, 2017, *available at* <https://gizmodo.com/facebook-reportedly-used-anti-muslim-ad-as-test-case-in-1819645900>.

⁷ Adam Entous, Craig Timberg, & Elizabeth Dwoskin, "Russian operatives used Facebook ads to exploit America's racial and religious divisions," The Washington Post, Sept. 25, 2017, *available at* https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/russian-operatives-used-facebook-ads-to-exploit-divisions-over-black-political-activism-and-muslims/2017/09/25/4a011242-a21b-11e7-ade1-76d061d56efa_story.html?tid=sm_tw&utm_term=.e49cecc1a834.

⁸ Dylan Byers, "Exclusive: Russian-bought Black Lives Matter ad on Facebook targeted Baltimore and Ferguson," CNN Media, Sept. 28, 2017, *available at* <http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/27/media/facebook-black-lives-matter-targeting/index.html>.

⁹ Adam Entous, Craig Timberg, & Elizabeth Dwoskin, "Russian Facebook ads showed a black woman firing a rifle, amid efforts to stoke racial strife," The Washington Post, Oct. 2, 2017, *available at* https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/russian-facebook-ads-showed-a-black-woman-firing-a-rifle-amid-efforts-to-stoke-racial-strife/2017/10/02/e4e78312-a785-11e7-b3aa-c0e2e1d41e38_story.html?utm_term=.aa2267a2f46c.

simply exploited the hateful content and activity already present. We are concerned about how a platform like Facebook's could operate without appropriate safeguards that take into account how it could be manipulated to further sow divisions in our society.

As a company and social network platform whose mission is "to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together,"¹⁰ we hope that you understand the gravity of this hateful rhetoric and behavior. During a time when anti-Muslim, anti-Black, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-immigrant sentiment has swept the nation, it is more important than ever for companies like yours to take an unequivocal stance against bigotry.

Over the years, many of us have raised concerns about how your platform may have a negative impact on our communities, with disappointing results. For example, we have requested that you address attacks on African Americans and Muslims, organizing by hate groups, and the censorship of Black, Arab, Muslim, and other marginalized voices. As a result of the pervasive presence and organizing by hate groups on your platform—some could not exist as national level entities without it—we have repeatedly requested that you convene a gathering with civil rights organizations to discuss appropriate and strategic responses. While you were unable to sufficiently respond to the concerns raised above, Facebook participated in and organized events that stigmatized Muslims and other communities such as a recent convening called "Tech Against Terrorism."

Though in the past you have displayed a willingness to listen to our concerns, we have yet to see meaningful change. It is our hope that recent developments will mark a new chapter in Facebook's commitment to protecting the rights of all who use your platform.

As we continue this important dialogue, we urge you to:

1. Fully disclose to the public all of the ads, pages, events, accounts, and posts you have traced back to Russian operatives targeting African American, LGBTQ, and Muslim communities. In particular, we believe that Facebook has a special responsibility to notify those individuals and organizations who have been impersonated or misrepresented.
2. Bring on an independent third-party team to conduct a thorough and public audit of the civil rights impact of your policies and programs, as well as how the platform has been used by hate groups, political entities, and others to stoke racial or religious resentment or violence. Other leading companies in the

¹⁰ Facebook "About" page, February 4, 2004, *available at* https://www.facebook.com/pg/facebook/about/?ref=page_internal.

industry like Airbnb have made the decision to conduct such an assessment, and we hope you will follow their lead.

3. Regularly convene a new working group of a diverse group of civil rights organizations working to counter bigotry, and solicit input on policies and processes from this group. And, integrate addressing hate into Facebook's corporate structure by:
 - a. Assigning a board committee with responsibility for assessing management efforts to stop hate groups, state actors, and individuals engaged in hate from using your platform and tools;
 - b. Assigning a senior manager who is a member of Facebook's Executive Team with authority to oversee addressing hate company-wide and name that person publicly and employing staff with expertise in this area to vet advertisements and develop process and procedures the address this issue; and,
 - c. Creating a committee of outside advisors with expertise in identifying and tracking hate who will be responsible for producing an annual report on the effectiveness of steps taken by Facebook.
4. Develop, with input from diverse civil rights groups and experts, and make public a clear process for how Facebook:
 - a. Reviews content constituting hate speech;
 - b. Reviews efforts to use Facebook as a platform to stoke identity-based, racial, or religious resentment or violent actions; and,
 - c. Responds to complaints about content that reasonably creates fear and chills speech on Facebook.
5. Make public detailed information regarding training and support for anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-black, and anti-LGBTQ organizations, including the monetary value of these services; and establish a fund to provide grants to organizations combating hatred and bigotry.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please contact Naheed Qureshi at naheed@muslimadvocates.org with any questions.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Arab American Institute (AAI)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Center for Media Justice

Center for New Community
Color of Change
CREDO
Human Rights Campaign (HRC)
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
MoveOn.org
Muslim Advocates
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Sikh Campaign
Sikh Coalition
Southern Poverty Law Center