

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

17 March 2017

Peter Barron
Vice-President, Communications and Public Affairs
Google Europe, the Middle East and Africa

Sent by email to: ngummer@google.com

Dear Mr Barron

I am writing further to your oral evidence on hate crime before the Committee on 14 March during which you provided a number of assurances about the measures your company takes to tackle hate, abuse and extremism online. Since then more troubling information has emerged.

We raised with you the issue of National Action, a proscribed organisation which the Government has said is linked with terrorism, and whose activities are now as a result illegal. You agreed that the video we reported to you should be taken down.

However we have since carried out a quick search on YouTube using the term "National Action". There are a whole series of further hate filled promotional videos by National Action still on You Tube. These include one in which masked men shout "they fear us because they think we will gas them, and we will."

Given the concerns we raised at the Committee it is frankly astonishing that Google and YouTube have not managed to put the words "National Action" into one of your search engines to see what remains on your platform and to remove it. I am sure you will agree that the Committee should not have to make further complaints to you to ensure that all videos from this proscribed organisation are now properly removed from your platform.

Secondly we raised with you the issue of adverts being put on hate videos so that both extremist groups and Google end up profiting from hate. You assured us that Google and YouTube "do not allow hate speech or terrorist content to be monetised. Whenever that is drawn to our attention it is, of course, shut down".

It appears from reports in the media today that this is not the case, and that in fact Government advertisements and major brands advertising is still being placed on inappropriate and hate filled sites. As a result Google and these organisations are still profiting from hatred.

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In addition to explaining to the Government and to your advertisers how this has happened and what you are doing to prevent it ever happening again, please can you provide the Committee with a full explanation of this, including whether you will be refunding money to the Government and other advertisers.

At the Committee hearing you said that YouTube refused to do proactive checks for illegal content - even for terrorist activity or online child abuse. In order to maintain your advertising revenue from the Government and the major brands that have raised concerns, will you now be proactively checking what sites advertisements are placed on?

While you undertake this proactive checking for appropriateness for advertising content, will you also now check whether such sites are illegal (including whether they are linked to child abuse or terrorism) or whether they go against your own community standards (including the hate speech that you say is unacceptable on your platform).

As I said at the Committee evidence session, we also look forward to hearing from you about the number of staff and the level of investment you put in to checking content that is illegal or against your community standards.

Google is the second richest company on the planet. The lack of effort and social responsibility it is showing towards hate crime on YouTube is extremely troubling. It is inexplicable to us that Google can move very fast to remove material from YouTube when it is found to be copyrighted, but that the same prompt action is not taken when the material involves proscribed organisations and hateful and illegal content.

The Committee expects to hear from you on how you are using some of YouTube's very significant revenue to put this problem right by devoting sufficient resources to ensure that vile and illegal material is removed proactively from your platforms, and that neither you nor those that create these videos profit from hatred.

I look forward to a swift reply.

Yours sincerely



Yvette Cooper MP
Chair