



Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
The Prime Minister of New Zealand

Dear Prime Minister,

The ICT for Peace Foundation sincerely welcomes your joint initiative with President Macron for the Christchurch Call and the goal of trying to find new ways and solutions to prevent the spread of violent extremism and terrorism online. I would also like to thank you once again for the invitation to participate in the Voices for Action meeting in Paris on May 14th, which I am delighted to be able to attend and contribute our input to this important process.

Through our work at ICT4Peace over the past years, we have witnessed and analyzed the changing use of social media and its growing impact on critical issues related to democracy, political stability, freedom, communication and security. The euphoria about the role of social media as a primarily positive force during the Arab Spring has given way to a much more layered and complex picture of its role and uses across society and around the globe. The sheer enormity of today's social media platforms, the volume of users and almost infinite mass of content, means that the containment of the spread of violent content, as witnessed after the Christchurch attack, proved almost impossible. Despite now serious attempts by social media platforms to control content that violates norms, human beings alone simply can't keep up with the speed and connectivity of content creation around the world. This task can only be computationally managed by algorithms and AI, but these are also opaque, offering biased recommendations, search functions and are in part responsible themselves for the rise in extremism, conspiracy theories and destabilizing content online.

The challenge of balancing the need to maintain a free and open Internet with the need for security and protection of human beings, data, ethical principles, human rights and democratic processes is daunting. We fully support both the goal of trying to achieve a broad alliance pushing for practical change to prevent the glorification of the perpetrators of mass murder, and the spirit symbolized in your recent statement that just because it is difficult is "not a reason to step back and not try". At the ICT for Peace Foundation, we believe that we have a responsibility to current and future generations to ensure a framework for all emerging technologies that respects basic human rights and ethical principles.

We have been working on these issues for many years now, including, launching on behalf of the UN Security Council the Tech against Terrorism platform with inter alia Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and Telefonica; carrying out cybersecurity policy and diplomacy capacity building for inter

alia ASEAN and the CLMV countries; working with the UN GGE and ASEAN on norms of responsible state behaviour for cybersecurity with the ASEAN regional Forum on CBMs; carrying out workshops in Myanmar, Sri Lanka on online content verification and online security; participating in the CCW GGE discussions in Geneva on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), and analyzing the role of artificial intelligence and its role in peace-time threats such as surveillance, data privacy, fake news, justice, the changing parameters of health including the risks of certain biotechnological advances and other emerging technologies.

In particular the work of my colleague Sanjana Hattotuwa (currently a PhD student at the University of Otago studying how Twitter and Facebook are integral to political communications and cycles of violence in Sri Lanka), has been seminal on social media issues, anchored in his own experience with online media in a country itself devastated by war and most recently the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks.

During this debate and moving forward with the goal of preventing the use of social media for terrorist purposes, "it is important in these difficult times also to remember that just as social media helps extremist ideology take seed and grow, it also helps in healing, empathy, gestures of solidarity, expressions of unity, the design of conciliatory measures and the articulation of grief and sympathy. In the immediate aftermath of the Christchurch attack, a cursory top-level study of the nearly 85,000 tweets generated in the 24 hours after the violence shows a global community outraged or dismayed at terrorism, an outpouring of love, empathy and solidarity, engagement that spans many continents and languages, addressing prominent politicians and journalists, featuring hundreds of smaller communities anchored to individuals based in New Zealand and in a manner overwhelmingly supportive of the Muslim community." *Sanjana Hattotuwa, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1903/S00124/pulse-points.htm>*

We believe that our work and research can assist the New Zealand government move forward with this initiative and we would be delighted to contribute and make available our expertise, should it be of interest.

In the spirit of trying to reinforce and expand social media as a force for good, while limiting its scope as a tool for evil, we are looking forward to working together and to our first meeting in Paris,

With my best regards,



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