

Jennifer G. Newstead
Chief Legal Officer
Meta
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025
United States

22 December 2021

Dear Ms. Newstead,

UN Watch is a Swiss non-governmental organization mandated to monitor the performance of the United Nations by the yardstick of its own Charter. Our human rights organization was founded in Geneva by former United States Ambassador Morris Abram, a civil rights leader who worked closely with Rev. Martin Luther King and drafted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. World figures have strongly endorsed our mission including former UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan, who praised “the valuable work performed by UN Watch.”

We are writing to you because in the last year we received two completely baseless strikes against our verified page (facebook.com/unwatch) and that of our Executive Director (facebook.com/hillelneuer). This has resulted in punitive action by Facebook to restrict the reach of both those pages, causing damage to our human rights work. No explanation or detail was provided to justify the strikes beyond a general claim that the content “violated Facebook’s Community Standards.”

UN Watch is troubled by the lack of clarity in Facebook’s Community Standards, the lack of transparency and arbitrariness in the application of those standards and what appears to be abuse of those standards by individuals acting in bad faith to harass UN Watch.

Strike Against the Hillel Neuer Facebook Page

Our Executive Director, Hillel Neuer, is an international lawyer and human rights activist who has been awarded an honorary doctorate by McGill University for his defense of fundamental freedoms. The City of Chicago declared “Hillel Neuer Day” in recognition of his contributions “to promote peace, justice and human rights around the world.” Astonishingly, Facebook is now threatening to remove his account, on entirely baseless grounds.

On August 17, 2021, Mr. Neuer’s Facebook page posted the screenshot of a tweet showing armed Taliban leaders just after they had entered the Presidential Palace in

Kabul along with the wry caption, “Prediction: Ben and Jerry’s will never announce a boycott of the Taliban.”¹

For no good reason at all, Facebook deleted this post as a purported violation of its “Community Standards on dangerous organizations.”

In fact, thousands of people who read and liked this post, which was shared on various social media platforms, understood that it was condemning the horrific human rights abuses of the Taliban, a terrorist organization subject to UN Security Council sanctions, and implicitly criticizing the ice cream company’s decision to cancel the license of its Israeli distributor, even as Ben & Jerry’s turned a blind eye to gross abuses worldwide.

In other words, Hillel Neuer and UN Watch agree with Facebook’s classification of the Taliban as a dangerous organization. Notably, the same post appeared on the UN Watch Facebook page with no adverse consequences, drawing over 2,000 likes and 500 shares.²

We can only speculate that bad faith actors orchestrated certain actions that caused Facebook to strike the post from Mr. Neuer’s page—leading to your shocking and baseless threat to remove his account. Facebook’s decision to strike the post is alarming because it suggests that the Facebook employees charged with enforcing Facebook’s Community Standards either did not read or understand the post, or are not qualified to apply Facebook’s Community Standards.

Strike Against the UN Watch Facebook Page

On February 12, 2021, the UN Watch Facebook page posted a screenshot of a tweet by Mr. Neuer showing a *Reuters* story entitled “UAE becomes first Arab country to reach Mars.”³

In a play on the wording of the *Reuters* caption, Mr. Neuer had tweeted, “Let us hope that one day the Arabs in Gaza will also be educated to launch rockets to Mars and not at people.” By sharing the *Reuters* photo, the post celebrated women’s advancement in education and scientific fields. The added comment by Hillel Neuer criticized Hamas rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, which have been widely condemned by world leaders from U.S. President Joe Biden to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Facebook provided no explanation for the strike, and it is not clear at all why Facebook decided that this post violated its Community Standards on hate speech. Once again, we can only assume that the challenge was triggered by people acting in bad faith who oppose our human rights work. Nevertheless, Facebook inexplicably upheld the strike even after UN Watch challenged it.

¹ @HillelNeuer, TWITTER (November 23, 2021, 6:18 PM), <https://twitter.com/HillelNeuer/status/1463180037767708672>.

² UN Watch, FACEBOOK (August 18, 2021, 4:00 PM), <https://www.facebook.com/unwatch/posts/10157940224541561>.

³ @HillelNeuer, TWITTER (February 10, 2021, 9:07 PM), <https://twitter.com/HillelNeuer/status/1359579813766381569>.

In this regard, UN Watch notes that Facebook's Community Standards on hate speech have been widely criticized for being vague and overbroad and failing to provide sufficient guidance both to users and to the Facebook employees charged with enforcing them.

Facebook itself has acknowledged the problem. In an article linked in its Community Standards on hate speech, Facebook explains that "there is no universally accepted answer for when something crosses the line..." The Facebook article also adds that "regional and linguistic context is often critical, as is the need to take geopolitical events into account."

Despite the criticism which Facebook has acknowledged, Facebook's Community Standards on hate speech still fail to conform to international standards on human rights and free speech. According to a comprehensive 2019 study supervised by an international committee of experts including the Chair of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, entitled *Reducing Online Hate Speech: Recommendations for Social Media Companies and Internet Intermediaries*, "policies and rules aimed at reducing hate speech should conform to international human rights standards, as found in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in other international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the European Convention on Human Rights and other regional human rights conventions..." Article 19 of the ICCPR provides that any restrictions on free speech must be "provided by law," meaning they should be formulated concisely in a way that enables individuals to regulate their conduct (*see* ICCPR General Comment 34).

In light of the foregoing, UN Watch requests: (a) that the strikes against the UN Watch and Hillel Neuer Facebook pages be immediately removed, and that all punitive action against those Facebook pages be terminated; and (b) that Meta take the necessary steps to ensure that, going forward, bad faith actors can no longer trigger baseless actions against the Facebook and Instagram accounts of UN Watch and Hillel Neuer.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ms. Dina Rovner
Legal Advisor

cc: Michele Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Linda Thomas-Greenfield, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations