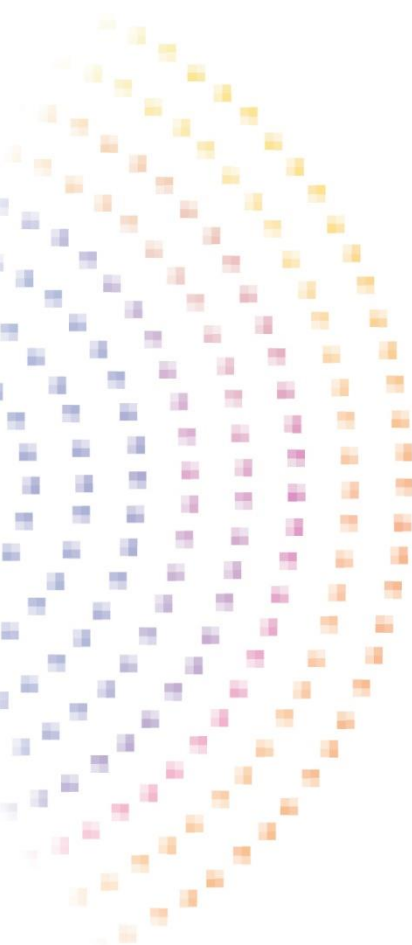# CHRISTCHURCH CALL

**TO ELIMINATE TERRORIST & VIOLENT EXTREMIST CONTENT ONLINE**

# Online Content from the Israel-Gaza Conflict

## Problem

The Hamas terror attack on Israel on Saturday, 7 October and subsequent Israeli military operations have led to the online dissemination of a massive amount of illegal terrorist and violent extremist content [TVEC], and harmful content that depicts and incites hatred and violence targeting Jewish and Muslim communities. While the ongoing situation makes analysis difficult, the volume and reach of illegal and harmful content appears unprecedented.

Online content generated during the conflict is having a profound impact on individuals, communities, and societies around the world. It is causing violence, fear, suffering, and damaging social cohesion.

Call Supporters and Partners have worked around the clock to respond. Based on open-source investigation and the research of Community members, however, it appears that the scale and complexity of illegal and harmful content has proved challenging even for the largest online service providers. This occurs in an environment where trust and safety teams and budgets have been pared back. The Community's crisis response mechanisms have been challenged and gaps in these are apparent.

The situation raises important questions around how the Call responds to ongoing conflicts and converging crises that cause a spike in and sustained production of TVEC, including as part of distributed propaganda campaigns that raise the baseline of online hatred and violent content to dangerous levels.

The Call Community's response must be sensitive to the views of impacted communities and responsive to their needs; protect and respect human rights – including to document and access information about significant events; and maintain a free, open, and secure internet.

## Evidence

Call Partners and CCAN members have monitored, analysed, and reported on content emanating from the conflict. They have documented how videos and images captured by Hamas militants using head-mounted cameras and drones spread quickly from Telegram to all major social media platforms.[1] Hamas and its supporters were also able to circumvent bans on platforms like Facebook by using victims' own social media accounts.[2]

Hamas content, material depicting Israel's response and the ensuing conflict, and content of deniable or uncertain origin, has been picked up and repurposed in extremist networks, as part of conspiracies and in coordinated disinformation and foreign interference campaigns.[3] This has contributed to a surge in antisemitic and Islamophobic hate and threats,[4] and stochastic attacks against Jews and Muslims around the world.[5]

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[1] GNET, Memetica, Tech Against Terrorism.
[2] Brookings, Memetica.
[3] Institute for Strategic Dialogue

[4] Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Memetica, Tell MAMA UK.
[5] For example in Beijing, Arras, Chicago and Brussels.

There is also a large amount of bystander and CCTV footage associated with the conflict and subsequent attacks. Often it has been shared by individuals bearing witness to these events and expressing their grief and outrage.[6] Media have also incorporated both Hamas and bystander content alongside war footage in reporting, sometimes without warning labels or adhering to industry standards or ethics frameworks.

## Response

Call Supporters, Tech Against Terrorism and the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) have worked hard to monitor and respond to the evolving situation, consistent with their respective policies and protocols. There has been a particular focus on preventing the threatened livestream or sharing of videos depicting hostage executions.

- For online service providers, the response has involved standing up special teams with Arabic and Hebrew language capability, making changes to recommendation algorithms and internal moderation queues, engaging third-party fact-checkers, and giving users advice and better tools to control their accounts and the content they see.[7]

- The GIFCT activated the Incident level of its Incident Response Framework. The GIFCT has been working with members and stakeholders to monitor the evolving conflict and provide members with in-depth situational analysis, research, and bespoke knowledge products to support their teams.[8]

- Tech Against Terrorism moved quickly to include the Hamas military wing in the Terrorist Content Analytics Platform, so that it could alert content to platforms hosting it. It provided intelligence reports and threat briefings to government and industry partners and issued public updates.

The sheer volume and variety of content, and different contexts and reasons for sharing have made it challenging to respond – from a legal, policy, technological and organisational perspective – and to do so in a swift, effective and rights-affirming way. Governments have called for more transparency around the industry response. Civil society organisations have expressed concerns about censorship, exclusion from access to the internet, and actions impeding the work of journalists and human rights defenders.[9] They have also expressed concern about Government legal responses placing pressure on online service providers to over-remove content.

While the conflict continues there is little prospect that production and attempts to disseminate illegal TVEC and harmful content will tail off. Some commentators have suggested the situation raises the prospect of the online volume, reach, and intensity of TVEC and associated content settling at a new, much higher baseline than hitherto seen.

The Call Community must therefore act.

## Options

It is critical that Supporters have in place the people, policies, systems and tools they need to deliver the Call commitments in the current

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[6] Tech Against Terrorism.
[7] See, e.g., Meta's and Google's blogposts.
[8] See GIFCT blogposts.
[9] Access Now.

crisis, and to support smaller firms. Supporters must do so transparently, working in cooperation with Partners and CCAN.

This is an opportunity for the Call Community to look again at the crisis response system, to ensure it can be used to coordinate an effective response to the full range of incidents and content. That review should include consideration of situations where content from historic attacks threatens to spike, and the prospect of protracted conflicts generating complex mixes of content types. The European Commission's work on bystander content is a useful contribution to this work.

The Christchurch Call Crisis Response Protocol occupies a unique place in the crisis response system. It can provide strategic oversight and direction to the system and a platform for transparency, dialogue and cooperation among Supporters, Partners, and CCAN. As part of the review of the crisis response system, the Community should update the CRP to strengthen these basic functions.

In line with Leader's direction from last year's Summit, this work should also consider how to harness the expertise and capabilities of the Call Community – especially among Partners and in CCAN – to monitor and share information about content and responses, (including adverse human rights impacts); to flag and report TVEC to Supporters, GIFCT and Tech Against Terrorism; and to provide open-source intelligence and analysis.

This is also an opportunity for the Call Community to explore how it can leverage its expertise and capability to better contribute to strategic communications initiatives and positive interventions aimed at de-escalating

on- and offline conflicts where TVEC is a significant feature.

# Next Steps

Leaders are invited to reaffirm the applicability of the Call commitments in the context of the terrorist and violent extremist content emanating from the Gaza – Israel conflict, and to discuss the proposals in this paper as means to strengthen the Call community's response.

Subject to Leader's direction, the Call Secretariat will work with the multistakeholder Call Community to review the crisis response system; to update and strengthen the Christchurch Call Crisis Response Protocol; and to identify where and how the Call can usefully deliver strategic communication and other positive interventions to de-escalate tensions and prevent harm. The updated Crisis Response Protocol and system could be tested in a multistakeholder tabletop exercise in conjunction with the five-year anniversary of the Call, with a report back to Leaders to follow by end of June 2024.

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