



Publication: The Jerusalem Post (online)
Date: 09.09.2020
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THE JERUSALEM POST

TikTok, Israeli gov't team up to battle antisemitism, hate speech

"In the end, you can't deny that social networks shape our perception of reality... It has the power to corrupt people's minds," warned Strategic Affairs Minister Orit Farkash-Hacohen.

By ZACHARY KEYSER SEPTEMBER 9, 2020 18:57



The TikTok logo is seen on a screen over Times Square in New York City, U.S., March 6, 2020
(photo credit: REUTERS/ANDREW KELLY)





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Israeli government officials, led by the Strategic Affairs Ministry, hosted senior TikTok representatives on Tuesday to explore more effective ways to combat hate speech, antisemitism and incitement on the Chinese-owned video-sharing platform.

Ministry officials proposed an agenda for TikTok to devise a “system of collaboration to locate and remove hate content.” It comprises an educational program targeting young users focusing on the effects of hate speech on the wider public, schooling on antisemitism, and education regarding Israel.

The two parties agreed to convene regularly to build on the progress made at the meeting.

Strategic Affairs Minister Orit Farkash-Hacohen led the discussion alongside representatives from the Justice, Foreign Affairs, Economy, Communications and Diaspora Affairs ministries. She has already met with representatives from social media giants Facebook and Twitter.

Since taking up her post in May, Farkash-Hacohen has sharply criticized social media firms over their handling of antisemitism and incitement on their platforms. She described them as “a haven for misinformation and classic antisemitic tropes.”

“Public discourse is taking place on social networks almost exclusively. That is why I have set a goal for the ministry to increase our technological capabilities, as well as our discussions with social media companies, to





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create a different, better reality," she said.

"Our intention is that social media companies adopt transparent policies and, where relevant, remove incitement against the State of Israel. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to achieve the necessary results."

Farkash-Hacohen's first action as minister was to write to Twitter regarding tweets by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who called Israel "a cancerous growth" that must be cut off, and compared Israel to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Weeks later, a Twitter representative dismissed Khamenei's comments as "saber-rattling" that does not violate the company's terms of use, but Twitter and the Strategic Affairs Ministry formed a working group to address the problem of antisemitism on the platform, as it has now done with TikTok.

Farkash-Hacohen has revealed that TikTok reached out to her ministry to discuss antisemitism and incitement, even though the Chinese-owned social media platform declined to attend a Knesset meeting on the matter last month.

"In the end, you can't deny that social networks shape our perception of reality.... It has the power to corrupt people's minds," she warned.

Farkash-Hacohen called for greater accountability for the consequences of





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racist and antisemitic incitement on social media platforms, and for them to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. She's also called for social media companies to be more transparent and provide public reports on incitement and disinformation on their platforms.

TikTok's director of public policy, Elizabeth Kanter, noted that the company is "pleased to have the opportunity to meet with a number of representatives of the Israeli government to discuss this critical issue. TikTok's goal is to encourage creativity and happiness, and we will not tolerate hate speech on our platform."

IN A RELATED development, TikTok will be joining the European Union's voluntary code of conduct to combat illegal hate speech online, the European Commission said on Tuesday.

The commission enacted the code in May 2016 to direct tech firms to work with civil society organizations and public authorities to remove online hate speech.

Vera Jourova, the commission's vice president for values and transparency, said that TikTok's inclusion in the group - whose members include Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, Google, YouTube and Snapchat - was a positive step.

"Of course, I expect TikTok to adhere not only to the code's principles, but also to fully respect European law when operating on European soil,"





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Jourova said.

“Our ultimate goal is to eliminate hate on TikTok,” the company’s head of trust and safety for EMEA, Cormac Keenan, said in a statement. “We recognize that this may seem an insurmountable challenge as the world is increasingly polarized, but we believe that this shouldn’t stop us from trying.”

The Conference of European Rabbis praised TikTok’s decision to join the EU code of conduct.

“I welcome TikTok’s belated decision to join the EU’s Code of Conduct against illegal online hate speech. For years, social media has served as a platform for the promotion of discriminatory and bigoted views without any consequences for those who espouse them,” Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt said on Wednesday.

“Unlike hate groups of the past, extremist movements of recent times have been successful in normalizing their key messages, through their ability to post series of hateful propaganda to their followers on a regular basis,” he added.

Lahav Harkov and Reuters contributed to this report.

<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/senior-israeli-officials-meet-with-tiktok-representatives-in-israel-641580>

