

# Evaluating the Impact of Government and Company Commitments Under the Christchurch Call to Action

## *A Pilot Project of the Christchurch Call Advisory Network*

To mark the third year since the Christchurch Call to Action, the Christchurch Call Advisory Network (CCAN) embarked on a first-ever independent evaluation of the work done by supporting governments and companies (“supporters”) to further the Call. Through this pilot evaluation, the CCAN engaged with key signatories to understand how their commitments under the Call had shaped supporters’ approaches to curbing the spread of terrorist and violent extremist content in a manner consistent with human rights and a free, open and secure internet. In addition, our pilot evaluation examined ways in which supporting governments and companies engaged in multi-stakeholder discussion and policy development within the broader Call Community. This short brief summarizes our initial findings, which we will elaborate on further in a forthcoming report. It also includes a description of our methodology and several insights for future work that seeks to take stock of the impact of the Call.

### Findings

Overall, the supporting governments and companies we evaluated **were explicit about their shared commitment to the Call’s principles. Each of them clearly communicated through their public channels and media that they had joined the Call and were focused on curbing the spread of terrorist and violent extremist content online.** Some signatories have taken important legislative action in relation to abhorrent violent material online and the broadcasting of terrorist livestreams and have established independent authorities to provide oversight of these issues. This supports the conclusion that the Call has played a significant role in highlighting the urgency of this problem and the importance of coordination in tackling it.

In contrast, it was much **harder to find evidence that supporters had implemented their commitments under the Call beyond declarations of intent to do so.** If work was undertaken in response to the Call, it was rarely identified as such, making measurement of the Call’s impact difficult. This raises questions about the consistency of the Call’s impact across its many government and company supporters. A few preliminary findings:

#### Meaningful transparency is needed to facilitate independent evaluation of supporters’ work under the Call

- Governments and companies do not frame much of their relevant work as relating to the Call, making it difficult to assess which policies and practices were motivated by their support for the Call.
- There are significant disparities between how much information different supporters disclose, making comparative evaluations difficult.

#### Evidence and outcomes of human rights due diligence processes are difficult to find

- Many governments and companies do not regularly disclose whether they engage in human rights due diligence around proposed changes to law, policies, or products; those

that do disclose that they engage in these processes rarely disclose their full outcomes, such as by publishing a human rights impact assessment.

- While company supporters each produced regular transparency reports regarding their general content moderation processes, they did not clearly disclose whether and how they upheld their Call commitments to ensure effective enforcement of their policies and terms of service, review their algorithmic processes, or analyze their policies and practices against human rights standards in a verifiable way.

#### Meaningful engagement with civil society is difficult to establish

- Governments and companies discuss their commitment to engaging with civil society but typically do not provide many concrete examples publicly.
- This may be due in part to concerns over the safety of civil society groups if they are clearly and publicly identified as working with government or company supporters. Researchers were able to get a glimpse into how supporters approached civil society engagement if and when they were able to engage with the supporter via phone call.
- When supporters engage the community or conduct a public consultation as part of the policy development process, it is unclear whether the feedback from civil society is incorporated into the resulting policy or practice.
- Sometimes participation within the Call serves as a stand-in for multi-stakeholder engagement at a local level.
- This lack of robust engagement with civil society, including local/domestic civil society, may be part of the reason that some supporters have adopted policies or funded initiatives that are in direct contrast with the principles laid out by the Call, or that may not be grounded in a solid evidence base.
- A siloed and selective approach to engaging civil society also limits the growth of Christchurch Call community within supporting countries.

#### Engagement with the Christchurch Call is siloed and there is little transparency around cross-Call collaboration, particularly in cases when crisis response protocols are enacted

- Within supporting governments and companies, the personnel responsible for substantive work on national security or terrorism and violent extremism are sometimes not the same departments or teams tasked with engagement with the Call. This can limit the ability of civil society, including CCAN, to identify appropriate and effective points of contact for engaging in a supporter's domestic or internal policy development processes and ensuring that these processes are consistent with the supporter's Call commitments.
- Civil society was not always involved in table top exercises to test crisis response protocols.
- In addition, few of the supporters we evaluated shared information regarding their experience with the crisis response protocols, making it difficult to evaluate whether cross-Call collaboration was successful.

#### Supporters' focus should be placed equally on prevention of terroristic violence as on the moments surrounding an incident of terrorism

- Stemming the spread of live-streamed violence is an important aim of the Call, but so is taking action to prevent more terroristic violence from occurring in the future.

Non-repetition of harm is vital to the recovery of affected communities and social cohesion.

- Very little engagement with affected communities was reported by supporting governments and companies. It appears that supporters have not prioritized engaging civil society representing communities targeted by terrorism and violent extremist movements in policy dialogue, or enacting prevention-focused frameworks, which are a key part of the Call.

## **Recommendations**

Meaningful transparency and more information-sharing with the CCAN, the broader Call community, and the public can facilitate a fuller implementation of the Call's commitments. This can be accomplished, in part, with more frequent and robust engagements with the CCAN by a broader cross-section of the supporting governments and companies. Regular reporting by supporters via publicly accessible repositories or web pages detailing signatories' efforts related to the Call would also help improve public awareness and documentation of their work under the Call. The Call community should engage in an open conversation to discuss metrics for evaluating work done by supporters to implement the Call. To that end, CCAN shares below several additional insights drawn from our methodology in conducting this preliminary evaluation. We will elaborate upon our recommendations in more detail in a forthcoming report.

## **Methodology and Insights from the CCAN Evaluation Process**

### *Methodology*

To begin this pilot evaluation, we first selected a subset of the Call's commitments to focus our assessment on some overarching themes of the Call: transparency, human rights due diligence, civil society engagement, and cross-Call collaboration. We also selected a small sample of the supporting governments and companies to include in this first evaluation. We chose six governments—New Zealand, France, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and India—and four companies—Microsoft, Meta, Twitter and Google. We chose these signatories based on their role as leaders of the Call (in the case of New Zealand and France), the longevity of their support for the Call, and our internal capacity to conduct this analysis, such as familiarity with language, legal systems, and access to resources.

Our evaluation was conducted through two workstreams: (1) direct engagement with the governments and companies that we evaluated and (2) independent research. Representatives of the New Zealand government sent out a survey on our behalf to the ten supporting governments and companies on June 30, 2022. The survey was designed to enable us to form a comprehensive understanding of the types of initiatives supporters had pursued that were relevant to the aims of the Call. In some cases, our researchers also conducted calls with representatives from the supporter governments and companies. The New Zealand government was a strong supporter of our evaluation project and was able to direct attention to the survey amongst appropriate points of contact within each supporting organization. We sent out a reminder to complete the survey at the beginning of August, and by September 1, 2022, we had received responses from 7 out of 10 of the governments and companies we evaluated. (We did not receive responses from 1 company and 2 governments.)

Our desk researchers, made up of members of the CCAN and experts in the field, conducted independent research concurrently to the survey distribution. We developed a set of criteria and an evaluation rubric for evaluating supporters' activities under each of the selected commitments of the Call. Researchers conducted an analysis of primary sources (government or company statements, laws and policies, and publicly accessible examples of practice) and secondary sources (independent research conducted by civil society, international bodies, and other groups). Researchers shared preliminary analyses through short documents and met with CCAN members over the summer to discuss findings and recommendations throughout the research process.

Over the course of this project, we have learned many lessons that would be useful for any future efforts to evaluate the impact of the Call or the activities of its supporters. We have shared these insights at the end of this brief.

### *Insights*

The first challenge was to develop a rigorous, consistent framework through which to conduct our analysis. We pursued a collaborative approach to shape the scope of inquiry and analysis for this project, engaging in group discussions within the CCAN to select commitments in the Call that we would include in our analysis and to develop the criteria we would use in evaluating a supporter's adherence to these commitments. This was an essential discussion to have as the Call commitments themselves do not specify in a deep level of granularity what amounts to "success" in upholding the Call.

We recognize that there may be other criteria that could be used to evaluate supporter activity and the impact of the call overall; as the CCAN, we selected Call commitments and evaluation criteria that were most closely related to our key concerns of protecting and promoting human rights and maintaining an open Internet. Going forward, the Call Community could engage in a broader, multi-stakeholder discussion about the ways in which we could collectively evaluate progress under the call.

We pursued the same collaborative approach in drafting and editing the questions on the survey. Members of the CCAN all brought their own perspective and expertise in a particular government, company, or issue and shaped the scope of inquiry to be relevant, specific, and focused on our most urgent priorities. Future evaluations and stock-taking exercises should incorporate a similar multi-stakeholder approach to determining which questions to use to evaluate supporters' activities.

Additionally, while the survey was a good touch point to initiate discussions, supporters were often more likely to share information via call than they were over email. Frequent reminders to supporters to respond to the survey was also necessary, particularly during the month of August. Future evaluations should consider employing multiple formats for information-gathering and ensuring that time frames for evaluation projects are sufficiently long to ensure robust engagement.