CCAN Report on Anti-Dehumanization Policy - Executive Summary
Christchurch Call Leaders' Summit 2022

The Christchurch Call Advisory Network (**CCAN**) has led work over the past year to understand Members' responses to dehumanizing speech and discourse. Christchurch, Buffalo, the ISIS genocides of Yazidi people and other historical atrocities were all preceded by the dehumanization of an outgroup. Dehumanizing speech or language includes describing a group based on a protected attribute as biologically subhuman ("cockroaches," "microbes," "parasites," "yellow ants"), mechanically inhuman ("logs," "packages," "enemy morale"), or supernaturally alien ("devils," "Satan," "demons"). Dehumanizing discourse portrays a protected group as polluting, despoiling or debilitating society or presenting a powerful menace or existential threat to society (e.g., conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement Theory).

Call Commitments

Responding to dehumanization is a critical part of the Call's Commitments.

1. To counter the drivers of terrorism and violent extremism.
2. To promote community-led efforts to counter violent extremism in all its forms.

By reducing the prominence of dehumanizing language and discourse, we

1. Disrupt a powerful tool used to build audiences and radicalize to the point of violence.
2. Strengthen society's 'resilience' to violent ideology by maintaining moral barriers to violence.
3. 'Strengthen inclusiveness' by protecting all peoples and responding to the experience of terrorism survivors and their communities.

Dehumanization provides a valuable framework for policy

1. Dehumanization is distinct from hate speech because it aims to lower an audience's moral reflexes towards a particular group by removing them from the human family.
2. It is more readily apparent and definable as conduct than concepts of disinformation, hate speech or extremism on their own.
3. It provides a lasting framework that can respond to changes in discourse and targeted groups over time. It explains how a range of groups based on race, religion (including no religion), gender, gender identity, disability and other protected attributes are dehumanized through hate speech and cumulative discourse.

CCAN's Dehumanization project

In March 2022, CCAN distributed a request for information to all members of the Christchurch Call, including tech companies and governments. Based on the responses, CCAN has

formulated advice for Members seeking to work together on policies to counter dehumanization. Call Members can find the full report on the CCAN website: https://christchurchcall.network/.

Responses to information request

From the responses received, members of the Call (except for Twitter) did not have explicit policies or responses to dehumanizing speech. Members did not have an explicit policy or response to dehumanizing discourse. Definitions for both were largely missing.

Civil laws: Under half of the respondents had civil laws that could penalize dehumanizing language or discourse provided it met specific thresholds in their legislation. Of those examples, the burden remained largely with the community to bring forward complaints.
Criminal laws: All respondents had criminal laws that could penalize dehumanizing language or discourse if it met the threshold in their legislation. However, the thresholds vary greatly. Some laws only apply to direct attacks on individuals online rather than direct or cumulative attacks on group identities. Dehumanization through discourse such as disinformation may not meet the harm threshold.
Disinformation: Regulatory approaches to disinformation vary greatly.

Key CCAN observations

The Call's strength lies in creating space for Members, including CCAN, to work together on strategies to complement and support each other on the global internet. We ask that the Call create space to discuss policy responses and definitions for dehumanizing speech and discourse. This would elevate the perspective of terrorism victims and strengthen the prevention-focused efforts of the Call.

The Call may wish to recognize

1. The serial or systematic dehumanization of an out-group identified on the basis of a protected characteristic is a form of violence, an attribute of TVEC and a driver of violence.
2. Portraying groups through curated information as polluting, despoiling or debilitating society or as an existential threat to society is a powerful form of dehumanization.
3. Dehumanization creates risk for targeted groups, society, and democracies.

Levers for enforcement need to be carefully considered in any response. Principles for consideration include

1. The burden of enforcement should not remain on targeted communities,
2. The response should protect communities (not only individuals) and cover cumulative harm.
3. The response should prioritize non-carceral approaches that are fit for purpose.
4. Relevant decision-makers must have enough independence and scope to consider all contributors to dehumanization.
5. Human rights diligence by civil society needs to be encouraged.