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To the attention of the Representatives of Technological Companies (Meta, Twitter, Google TikTok, OpenAI, Anthropic, and Viber)

**Ref: Enforcing existing content rules for public figures**

Distinguished Representatives,

Democracies worldwide are struggling with a space and time where digital transformation shapes how we access and process information.

We, the undersigned Members of Club de Madrid, all democratic former Heads of State or Government are reaching out to you with a profound sense of responsibility and concern about the backsliding of democratic values worldwide.

We understand the critical role those digital platforms play in shaping public discourse and are convinced that the unchecked proliferation of hate speech by public figures in the digital realm demands urgent attention.

With over [70 countries](#), representing more than half of the world's population, holding elections this year, the impact of digital and social media technologies on the electoral process cannot be overstated. While they can [enhance](#) democracy, their [misuse](#), especially in spreading hate speech by public figures, undermines civil and human rights. The [impact](#) of these technologies can weaken democracies and have an intensifying effect on authoritarian regimes.

The trend towards authoritarianism is alarming, with [more countries moving away from rather than towards democracy](#) since 2017. The impact of social media and AI manipulation heightens this threat, demanding immediate action from tech platforms to safeguard democracy. Given the equally unprecedented influence of social media platforms and of those adept at manipulating these, the introduction of AI and the still unknown breadth and depth of its effects, it is vital that platforms act *now* to do all they can to protect democracies and elections around the world.

The digital sphere has become a powerful amplifier of ideas and opinions, and it is our shared responsibility to ensure that it remains a space that promotes constructive dialogue rather than division. We acknowledge the importance of free expression, but we also recognize the imperative to curtail speech that incites violence, fuels discrimination, and jeopardizes social inclusion what, in Club de Madrid, we call *shared societies*.

Public and political figures must refrain from spreading hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy theories on social media platforms. We urge technology companies to prioritize the protection of voters and electoral processes, upholding electoral integrity, freedom of expression, and human rights. Given the significant influence of digital technologies, companies must ensure their impact is positive, safeguarding citizens, systems, and democratic principles.

Existing content rules on digital platforms have the potential to effectively address issues such as hate speech, religious discrimination, and incitement to violence. Enforcing these rules consistently and robustly can help curb the spread of harmful content, making significant progress in protecting global democracies. Research indicates that incendiary rhetoric from political leaders can escalate political violence, complicate law enforcement responses, and increase fear in vulnerable communities, especially as social media platforms and [algorithms tend](#)

[to amplify this rhetoric](#), reaching millions of followers. Concerningly, some politicians exploit social media tools to bypass fact-based rules and norms, including through targeted advertising.

Hate speech significantly impacts democratic participation, causing psychological harm and inhibiting constructive dialogue. It leads to a [“silencing effect”](#) where targeted groups withdraw from public discourse. Moreover, it fosters [desensitization](#), undermining empathy and hindering political compromise. This is particularly evident in the Middle East conflict and the alarming increase in online antisemitism and islamophobia, threatening individuals' rights to practice their faith freely, which is a fundamental human right and a core democratic principle. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said, “Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence.”

History [demonstrates](#) that hate speech, combined with disinformation, can fuel stigmatization, discrimination, and large-scale violence. Examples include its role as a [precursor to atrocity crimes](#), such as the Holocaust and the Muslim Rohingya genocide in Myanmar. In 2022, [violence against](#) the LGBTQ+ community surged, driven by widespread hate speech from various sources. Anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech from politicians and state officials was reported in [23 countries](#) across Europe, as well as Azerbaijan. There are many other marginalized groups, that are the targets of political hate speech, much of which proliferates online despite being illegal in some jurisdictions.

Your companies assert that politicians and public figures must adhere to community standards, yet exemptions for 'public interest' or 'newsworthiness' raise concerns. Additionally, there has been a [reduction in content moderation](#) and election integrity teams, particularly in non-English speaking areas. We urge you to reinvest in human resources for reviewing political speech across languages, not solely relying on AI.

As democratic former heads of state and government, we are commanded to safeguard democracy, including in the digital realm.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to discussing with you the positive and impactful steps taken to address the pressing issue of online hate speech by political and public figures.

Sincerely,

Carlos **Alvarado**, President of Costa Rica (2018-2022)

Jan Peter **Balkenende**, Prime Minister of the Netherlands (2002-2010)

Valdis **Birkavs**, Prime Minister of Latvia (1993-1994)

Kjell Magne **Bondevik**, Prime Minister of Norway (1997-2000; 2001-2005)

Laura **Chinchilla**, President of Costa Rica (2010-2014)

Dalia **Grybauskaitė**, President of Lithuania (2009-2019)

Alfred **Gusenbauer**, Chancellor of Austria (2007-2008)

Ivo **Josipovic**, President of Croatia (2010-2015)

Chandrika **Kumaratunga**, President of Sri Lanka (1994-2005)

Stefan **Löfven**, Prime Minister of Sweden (2014-2021)

Moussa **Mara**, Prime Minister of Mali (2014-2015)

James **Michel**, President of Seychelles (2004-2016)

Viktor **Yushchenko**, President of Ukraine (2005 –2010)

José Luis **Rodríguez Zapatero**, President of the Government of Spain (2004-2011)

Francisco **Sagasti**, President of Peru (2020-2021)

Jigmi Yoser **Thinley**, Prime Minister of Bhutan (2008-2013)

Aminata **Touré**, Prime Minister of Senegal (2013-2014)

Danilo **Türk**, President of Slovenia (2007-2012) and President of Club de Madrid

Cassam **Uteem**, President of the Republic of Mauritius (1992-2002)

Anthony **Jones**, Vice President and Executive Director of the Gorbachev Foundation of North America (GFNA)