

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

Mark Zuckerberg
CEO
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

November 17, 2020

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

I am writing to express my deep alarm at the role Facebook is playing in the catastrophic violence that has encompassed Ethiopia. Sometimes genocidal hate speech that is being propagated in many languages by many actors, both inside Ethiopia and abroad, has found a viral audience on your platform, and has almost certainly contributed directly to the massacres of civilians based on their ethnicities.

The situation in Ethiopia is precarious and has a very real chance of collapsing into one of the worst human rights and humanitarian crises in the world. Thousands have already fled across the border to Sudan, which is itself in a deeply fragile transition from dictatorship to democracy. Massacres of civilians because of their ethnicity and religion have become tragically commonplace. The Ethiopian government has jailed dissidents, threatened to bomb civilian areas, and entered into an all-out war with one of its regions. Experts on the region and atrocity crimes are ringing the alarm about the possibility of a massive refugee crisis, continued interethnic violence, and genocide.

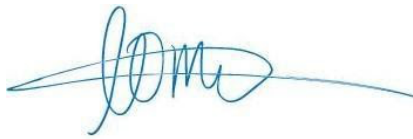
You and Facebook should have learned from past experience. The role Facebook played in the 2018 violence against Sri Lankan Muslims prompted a public apology earlier this year. In that crisis, people were killed and beaten, and mosques and Muslim-owned homes and businesses burnt because of hate speech that disseminated on your platform.

Facebook's part in the genocide against Rohingya people in Burma is also well-documented. Facebook has publicly acknowledged its failure in that case to prevent the fomentation of hate speech and violence.

Alex Warofka said in 2018, regarding the Rohingya, that Facebook "can and should do more" to prevent its use for these brutal ends, but your ongoing contribution to sowing division, hatred, and genocidal violence in Ethiopia makes those words profoundly and disastrously hollow. Instead we have found once again that, when societies become divided to the point of hatred, and when that hatred burns to the point of targeted murder and massacres, there Facebook is in the center of it, as the catalyst and the engine of discord.

In Rwanda in 1994, the orders to murder Tutsis by extremist Hutus bent on genocide were famously issued over the radio. Mr. Zuckerberg, in 2020, you are that radio. It is up to you to turn it off.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ilhan Omar', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress