

5 April 2018  
Yangon, Myanmar

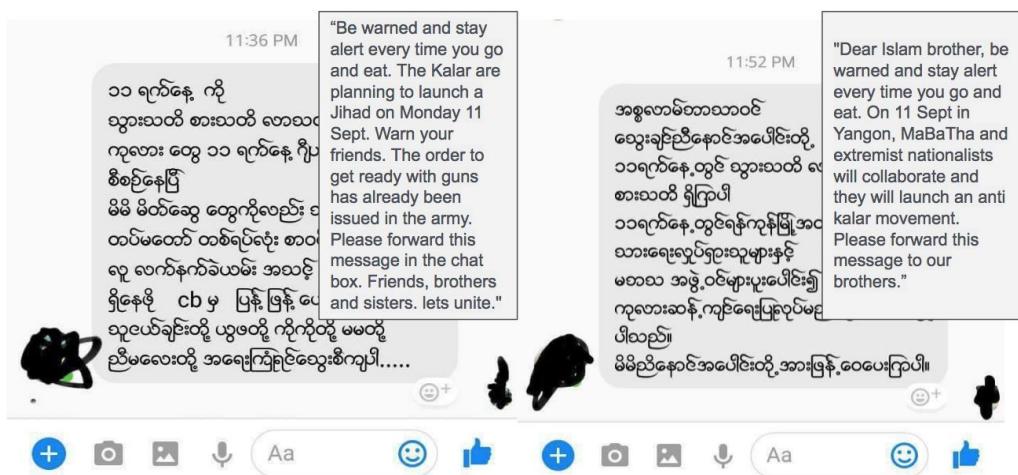
Dear Mark,

We listened to your [Vox interview](#) with great interest and were glad to hear of your personal concern and engagement with the situation in Myanmar.

As representatives of Myanmar civil society organizations and the people who raised the Facebook Messenger threat to your team's attention, we were surprised to hear you use this case to praise the effectiveness of your 'systems' in the context of Myanmar. From where we stand, this case exemplifies the very opposite of effective moderation: it reveals an over-reliance on third parties, a lack of a proper mechanism for emergency escalation, a reticence to engage local stakeholders around systemic solutions and a lack of transparency.

Far from being an isolated incident, this case further epitomizes the kind of issues that have been rife on Facebook in Myanmar for more than four years now and the inadequate response of the Facebook team. It is therefore instructive to examine this Facebook Messenger incident in more detail, particularly given your personal engagement with the case.

The messages (pictured and translated below) were clear examples of your tools being used to incite real harm. Far from being stopped, they spread in an unprecedented way, reaching country-wide and causing widespread fear and at least three violent incidents in the process. The fact that there was no bloodshed is testament to our community's resilience and to the wonderful work of peacebuilding and interfaith organisations. This resilience, however, is eroding daily as our community continues to be exposed to virulent hate speech and vicious rumours, which Facebook is still not adequately addressing.



## **Over-reliance on third parties**

In your interview, you refer to your detection ‘systems’. We believe your system, in this case, was us - and we were far from systematic. We identified the messages and escalated them to your team via email on Saturday the 9th September, Myanmar time. By then, the messages had already been circulating widely for three days.

The Messenger platform (at least in Myanmar) does not provide a reporting function, which would have enabled concerned individuals to flag the messages to you. Though these dangerous messages were deliberately pushed to large numbers of people - many people who received them say they did not personally know the sender - your team did not seem to have picked up on the pattern. For all of your data, it would seem that it was our personal connection with senior members of your team which led to the issue being dealt with.

## Lack of a proper mechanism for emergency escalation

Though we are grateful to hear that the case was brought to your personal attention, Mark, it is hard for us to regard this escalation as successful. It took over four days from when the messages started circulating for the escalation to reach you, with thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, being reached in the meantime.

This is not quick enough and highlights inherent flaws in your ability to respond to emergencies. Your reporting tools, for one, do not provide options for users to flag content as priority. As far as we know, there are no Burmese speaking Facebook staff to whom Myanmar monitors can directly raise such cases. We were lucky to have a confident english speaker who was connected enough to escalate the issue. This is not a viable or sustainable system, and is one which will inherently be subject to delays.



## Reticence to engage local stakeholders around systemic solutions

These are not new problems. As well as regular contact and escalations to your team, we have held formal briefings on these challenges during Facebook visits to Myanmar. By and large though, our engagement has been limited to your policy team. We are facing major challenges which would warrant the involvement of your product, engineering and data teams. So far, these direct engagements have not taken place and our offers to input into the development of systemic solutions have gone unanswered.

Presumably your data team should be able to trace the original sources of flagged messages and posts and identify repeat offenders, using these insights to inform your moderation and sanctioning. Your engineering team should be able to detect duplicate posts and ensure that identified hate content gets comprehensively removed from your platform. We've not seen this materialise yet.

## Lack of transparency

Seven months after the case mentioned, we have yet to hear from Facebook on the details of what happened and what measures your team has taken to better respond to such cases in the future. We are also yet to hear back on many of the issues we raised and suggestions we provided in a subsequent briefing in December.

The risk of Facebook content sparking open violence is arguably nowhere higher right now than in Myanmar. We appreciate that progress is an iterative process and that it will require more than this letter for Facebook to fix these issues.

If you are serious about making Facebook better, however, we urge you to invest more into moderation - particularly in countries, such as Myanmar, where Facebook has rapidly come to play a dominant role in how information is accessed and communicated; We urge you to be more intent and proactive in engaging local groups, such as ours, who are invested in finding solutions, and - perhaps most importantly - we urge you to be more transparent about your processes, progress and the performance of your interventions, so as to enable us to work more effectively together.

We hope this will be the start of a solution-driven conversation and remain committed to working with you and your team towards making Facebook a better and safer place for Myanmar (and other) users.

With our best regards,

