

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2020

Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Sheryl Sandberg
Chief Operating Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg and Ms. Sandberg,

As you know, women in public life make our democracies stronger, more representative and equitable. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that countries and localities led by women leaders tend to fare better in their outcomes. Unfortunately, women in politics face pervasive sexism, hate, harassment, and threats of violence on your platform that make it more difficult for them to succeed in public life. We are imploring Facebook to do more to protect the ability of women to engage in democratic discourse and to foster a safe and empowering space for women.

According to a study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, "...social media have become the number one place in which psychological violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats – is perpetrated against women parliamentarians." In fact, nearly 42 percent of women parliamentarians reported seeing extremely humiliating or sexually charged images of themselves spread through social media. Another recent study determined that in the United States, women elected officials were attacked more often than their male counterparts by fake news accounts, and that these attacks were more likely to be focused on personal traits or character.¹ For example, one sitting female Senator was attacked for not being authentically black or American.

¹ Lucina Di Meco, #ShePersisted: Women, Politics & Power in the New Media World, the Wilson Center, 2019.
<https://www.she-persisted.org/>

A growing body of evidence shows that women politicians around the globe are facing a deluge of gender-based attacks online, mixing weaponized hate and disinformation with the anonymity provided by social media to destroy women's reputations and push them out of public life. Globally, women politicians report facing extremely humiliating or sexually-charged images of them spread through social media. Women politicians of color and those who belong to religious minorities are at even greater risk of becoming targets.

Attacks against women on social media include a diversity of malicious behaviors, including sharing manipulated images, false news stories, personal information, and sexualized profiles. These attacks use impersonation, humiliation, doxing, stalking, electronic surveillance, and threats of violence. They play on common sexist tropes, portraying women as unlikable, emotional, unqualified, and dumb.

Make no mistake, these tactics, which are used on your platform for malicious intent, are meant to silence women, and ultimately undermine our democracies. It is no wonder women frequently cite the threat of rapid, widespread, public attacks on personal dignity as a factor deterring them from entering politics.

In order to protect the voices of women, we ask Facebook to start doing more to enforce its own rules. In particular, Facebook should:

- Quickly remove posts that threaten candidates with physical violence, sexual violence or death, and that glorify, incite or praise violence against women; disable the relevant accounts, and refer offenders to law enforcement;
- Eliminate malicious hate speech targeting women, including violent, objectifying or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, and derogatory sexual terms;
- Remove accounts that repeatedly violate terms of service by threatening, harassing or doxing or that use false identities to attack women leaders and candidates; and
- Remove manipulated images or videos misrepresenting women public figures.

In addition, Facebook should:

- Stop the amplification of gendered disinformation on your platform. Much of the most hateful content directed at women on Facebook is amplified by your algorithms which reward extreme and dangerous points of view with greater reach and visibility creating a fertile breeding ground for bias to grow.

These are steps Facebook can take right now, and they could not be more urgent. Women are increasingly running for office, and national leaders have recognized the need for more women to be elected officials. Additionally, the pandemic has reduced direct social interaction and increased our reliance on social media for information and dialogue on politics and news. In this context, it is past time to take a stand, and safeguard online spaces to allow all voices to be heard without manipulation, harassment, or intimidation. Our democracy, women, and countries around the globe depend on it.

We appreciate your giving our concerns your full and fair consideration, consistent with applicable statutes and regulations. We look forward to working with you on these issues.


Sincerely,



Jackie Speier
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Lois Frankel
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Brenda L. Lawrence
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Veronica Escobar
Vice-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Deb Haaland
Vice-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
House of Representatives

Tammy Baldwin, Senator, United States
Debbie Dingell, Member of Congress, United States
Nydia Velázquez, Member of Congress, United States
Barbara Lee, Member of Congress, United States
Ilhan Omar, Member of Congress, United States
Dina Titus, Member of Congress, United States
Lucille Roybal-Allard, Member of Congress, United States
Ann McLane Kuster, Member of Congress, United States

Pramila Jayapal, Member of Congress, United States
Nita Lowey, Member of Congress, United States
Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Member of Congress, United States
Anna G. Eshoo, Member of Congress, United States
Ayanna Pressley, Member of Congress, United States
Marcy Kaptur, Member of Congress, United States
Sylvia R. Garcia, Member of Congress, United States
Carolyn B. Maloney, Member of Congress, United States
Rosa DeLauro, Member of Congress, United States
Katherine Clark, Member of Congress, United States
Eddie Bernice Johnson, Member of Congress, United States
Cheri Bustos, Member of Congress, United States
Kathy Castor, Member of Congress, United States
Lisa Blunt Rochester, Member of Congress, United States
Alma S. Adams, PhD., Member of Congress, United States
Mary Gay Scanlon, Member of Congress, United States
Jan Schakowsky, Member of Congress, United States
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Member of Congress, United States
Gwen Moore, Member of Congress, United States
Suzanne Bonamici, Member of Congress, United States
Diana DeGette, Member of Congress, United States
Valeria Fedeli, Member of the Italian Senate, Italy
Sonja Lokar, Former Member of Parliament, Slovenia
Farahnaz Ispahani, Former Member of Parliament, Pakistan
Renate Künast, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Josephine Ortleb, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Katharina Schulze, Member of the Bavarian State Parliament, Germany
Terry Reintke, Member of the European Parliament, Germany
Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament, Austria
Alexandra Geese, Member of the European Parliament, Germany
Canan Bayram, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Anke Domscheit-Berg, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Dr. Monika Vana, Member of the European Parliament, Austria
Claudia Roth, Vice-President of the German Parliament, Germany
Filiz Polat, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Dr. Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Ekin Deligöz, Member of the German Parliament, Germany
Muhterem Aras, President of the Baden-Württemberg State Parliament, Germany
Sigi Maurer, Member of the Austrian Parliament, Austria
Ana Helena Chacon Echeverri, Former Vice President, Costa Rica
Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, Former President of Mauritius, Mauritius
Anna Burke, Former Member of Parliament, Australia
Radmila Sekerinska, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, North Macedonia

Snezana Kaleska Vanceva, Former Member of Parliament, North Macedonia
Gordana Comic, Member of Parliament and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, Serbia
Nada Drobnjak, Member of Parliament, Montenegro
Andreja Katic, Former Member of Parliament, Slovenia
Comfort Doyoe Cudjoe Ghansah, Member of Parliament and 2nd Deputy Chief Whip, Ghana
Meira Hot, Member of Parliament, Slovenia
Besima Boric, Member of Parliament, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Maja Sedlarevic, Member of Parliament, Serbia
Tanja Tomikj, Former Member of Parliament, North Macedonia
Ljubica Jelusic, Member of Parliament, Slovenia
Bojana Muršič, Member of Parliament, Serbia
Nermina Zaimovic -Uzunovic, Former Member of Parliament, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Laura Boldrini, Member of Parliament, Italy
Karolina Leakovic, Former Member of Parliament, Croatia
Meral Danış Beştaş, Member of Parliament, Turkey
Kati Piri, Member of the European Parliament, Netherlands
Lilianne Ploumen, Member of Parliament, Netherlands
Eglantina Gjermeni, Member of Parliament, Albania
Gamze Akkuş İlgezdi, Member of Parliament, Turkey
Eti Livni, Former Member of Knesset, Israel
Nicky Morgan, Baroness Morgan of Cotes, United Kingdom
Beeban Kidron, Baroness Kidron of Angel, United Kingdom
Helena Kennedy QC, Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws, United Kingdom
Valeria Valente, Member of the Italian Senate, Italy
Phumzile van Damme, Member of South African Parliament, South Africa
Mary Butler, Teachta Dála and Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Ireland
Holly Cairns, Teachta Dála, Ireland
Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, Teachta Dála, Ireland
Verona Murphy, Teachta Dála, Ireland
Jennifer Whitmore, Teachta Dála, Ireland
Ivana Bacik, Senator, Ireland
Lisa Chambers, Senator, Ireland
Emer Currie, Senator, Ireland
Alice-Mary Higgins, Senator, Ireland
Annie Hoey, Senator, Ireland
Sharon Keogan, Senator, Ireland
Erin McGreehan, Senator, Ireland
Rebecca Moynihan, Senator, Ireland
Fiona O'Loughlin, Senator, Ireland
Mary Seery Kearney, Senator, Ireland
Marie Sherlock, Senator, Ireland
Maria Miller, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom