Oversight Board

Public Comment Appendix for

Case 2023-32-IG-UA

Case number

Case description

During the summer of 2023, an Instagram user posted a video that shows a man confronting a woman in public because she is not wearing the hijab. The woman, whose face is shown in the video, was arrested following the incident. The accompanying caption, in Persian, indicates the user's support for the woman and more broadly for Iranian women standing up to the regime, while also commenting on the arrest using descriptive language.

Article 638 of the [Islamic Penal Code of Iran](#) penalizes women who appear in public without a "proper hijab." As the Board noted in the [Iran protest slogan](#) case, "digital spaces have become a key forum for dissent" in Iran. That case related to the protests that began in the country in September 2022 after the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody, who had been arrested for "improper hijab." Since then, the regime has increased its levels of surveillance to enforce this rule in public spaces, including by monitoring social media. Protesters in Iran have been using social media to organize themselves and to show their dissent by posting photos and videos as well as using these platforms to highlight the treatment of women by the authorities.

The content in this case was first identified by one of Meta's classifiers as a potential violation of Instagram's Community Guidelines and sent for human review. Multiple reviewers assessed the content but because they did not reach the same conclusion on whether the post was a violation, it was left up. A user then reported the content. In response to this report, a classifier determined the content was a potential violation of the Community Guidelines and sent it for additional review. Following this additional level of review, Meta removed the post from Instagram under its [Violence and Incitement](#) policy.

The user who posted the content appealed the removal decision to the Board. In their statement, the user explained the post was showing the bravery of the Iranian woman and that others had shared similar videos on social media.

The Board selected this case to explore Meta's policies and practices in moderating content that could impact the ongoing protests in Iran. This case falls within the Board's seven strategic priorities of elections and civic space, crisis and conflict situations, and gender.

As a result of the Board selecting this case, Meta initially determined that its decision to remove the content was correct because the caption contains a phrase, according to Meta, that could be interpreted as "intent to commit high-severity violence." Following additional input from Meta's regional teams and following the Board's decision in Call for women's protest in Cuba, Meta determined the content did not violate its policies and restored the post to Instagram. This time, Meta assessed the content under its Violence and Incitement and Coordinating Harm and Promoting Crime Community Standards.

The Board would appreciate public comments that address:

- How protesters, such as participants in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, use social media, including the role that images of unveiled women play in digital campaigns.

- The nature and gravity of the risks related to circulating pictures or videos on social media showing unveiled women in Iran and how that should impact Meta's content moderation.

- How the Iranian authorities have used social media to monitor dissenters and participants in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement.

- Meta's enforcement of its content moderation policies for Persian-language expression related to the political situation in Iran.

As part of its decisions, the Board can issue policy recommendations to Meta. While recommendations are not binding, Meta must respond to them within 60 days. As such, the Board welcomes public comments proposing recommendations that are relevant to this case.

Oversight Board

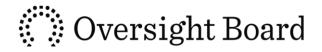Public Comment Appendix for

Case 2023-32-IG-UA
Case number

The Oversight Board is committed to bringing diverse perspectives from third parties into the case review process. To that end, the Oversight Board has established a public comment process.

Public comments respond to case descriptions based on the information provided to the Board by users and Facebook as part of the appeals process. These case descriptions are posted before panels begin deliberation to provide time for public comment. As such, case descriptions reflect neither the Board's assessment of the case, nor the full array of policy issues that a panel might consider to be implicated by each case.

To protect the privacy and security of commenters, comments are only viewed by the Oversight Board and as detailed in the Operational Privacy Notice. All commenters included in this appendix gave consent to the Oversight Board to publish their comments. For commenters who did not consent to attribute their comments publicly, names have been redacted. To withdraw your comment, please email contact@osbadmin.com.

To reflect the wide range of views on cases, the Oversight Board has included all comments received except those clearly irrelevant, abusive or disrespectful of the human and fundamental rights of any person or group of persons and therefore violating the Terms for Public Comment. Inclusion of a comment in this appendix is not an endorsement by the Oversight Board of the views expressed in the comment. The Oversight Board is committed to transparency and this appendix is meant to accurately reflect the input we received.

Oversight Board

Public Comment Appendix for

Case 2023-32-IG-UA
Case number

12
Number of Comments

Regional Breakdown

2	2	1	7
Central & South Asia	Europe	Middle East & North Africa	United States & Canada

0	0	0
Asia Pacific & Oceania	Sub-Saharan Africa	Latin America & Caribbean

2023-32-IG-UA	PC-21000	United States & Canada
Case number	Public comment number	Region
Howard	Wooldridge	English
Commenter's first name	Commenter's last name	Commenter's preferred language
DID NOT PROVIDE		No
Organization		Response on behalf of organization

Full Comment

In order that the public can learn about the 'life in the streets' for the women of Iran, they need to be able to see/hear/feel what happened here, as the woman was confronted and arrested. That said, I believe strongly that a person should be warned of the violent content and then deliberately click the button that says, yes, i want to see it.

Link to Attachment

No Attachment

2023-32-IG-UA

PC-21001

United States & Canada

Case number

Public comment number

Region

Withheld

Withheld

English

Commenter's first name

Commenter's last name

Commenter's preferred language

Withheld

No

Organization

Response on behalf of
organization

Full Comment

The choice to display their own face on social media without a hijab has to be granted,
regardless of the threat by the theocracy of Iran to use the image to prosecute the
individual. Only when enough protesters make the government see their errors will
this sort of thing end. This reminds me very much of the fining of the woman on the
street in London, U.K. who was persecuted for silently praying for children on a public
sidewalk. These unenforceable laws must end.

Link to Attachment

No Attachment

2023-32-IG-UA

Case number

PC-21002

Public comment number

United States & Canada

Region

Sandra

Commenter's first name

Clift

Commenter's last name

English

Commenter's preferred language

DID NOT PROVIDE

Organization

No

Response on behalf of organization

Full Comment

Showing such videos endangers those who chose to stand up to dictatorship authoritarian governments. It does nothing to help the narrative who feel repressed.

All are created equal its dictators and authoritarians who make others subservient to their needs.

Link to Attachment

No Attachment

2023-32-IG-UA

Case number

PC-21003

Public comment number

United States &
Canada

Region

Revy

Commenter's first name

White

Commenter's last name

English

Commenter's preferred language

DID NOT
PROVIDE

Organization

No

Response on behalf of
organization

Full Comment

I believe this being a form of peaceful protest as the lady has chosen not to wear the head dress. And therefore should be allowed to be posted. A man has a right to his free speech based off of his beliefs a woman should not go without a head garment. But so long as the language of the man is not violent towards the individual and it should be allowed. In my personal opinion a woman should be allowed to go without a headdress but I am of a different culture. I also believe that she should be allowed to protest peacefully by not wearing one. I don't think the post should be removed unless it is promoting violence and I do not see a promotion of violence from this post.

Link to Attachment

No Attachment

2023-32-IG-UA	PC-21007	Central & South Asia
Case number	Public comment number	Region

Maryam	Ali	English
Commenter's first name	Commenter's last name	Commenter's preferred language

Digital Rights Foundation		Yes
Organization		Response on behalf of organization

Full Comment

DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION PUBLIC COMMENT ON OVERSIGHT BOARD

CASE 2023-032-IG-UA (IRANIAN WOMAN CONFRONTED IN STREET)

Submission: Research Department, Digital Rights Foundation

Submission Date: 30th November, 2023

Meta's classifiers failed to assess the relevant context and took too abrupt a decision in removing the post shared on Instagram. The shared video showed a man confronting a woman in public because she was not wearing a hijab. The woman whose face was visible in the video, was arrested following the incident. The accompanying Persian caption used descriptive language to express the user's support for the woman in the video and all Iranian women standing up to the regime. As per Meta's assessment, the caption was construed as having an "intent to commit high severity violence," thereby violating its Violence and Incitement policy. The post was later restored to Instagram

under the Coordinating Harm and Promoting Crime policy after the user appealed to Meta and it was decided that the post did not violate community standards. This policy outlined that users may be allowed to advocate and debate the legality of content that aimed to draw attention to harmful or criminal activity as long as they did not advocate for or coordinate harm. It also outlined that any content that put unveiled women at risk would require additional information and context.

It is important to note that this context was provided in the post if the classifiers were designed to assess the content in totality instead of processing the caption and media individually. The attack did not take place in a vacuum and was a byproduct of strict moral policing by the Iranian state. This was exacerbated by ongoing political unrest that had unfolded in September 2022 when Mahsa Amini was taken into custody by the morality police under accusations of observing 'improper hijab' - where she suspiciously died of a heart attack. This sparked nationwide protests, united by the chant: 'Zan, Zendegi, Azadi' (Woman, Life, freedom).

For the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, social media and online platforms were paramount in the mobilization of protests and broadcasting of vital information. Videos and pictures from various protests in schools, universities, and streets were circulated which showed more and more women exercising their right to freedom of expression by appearing in public without their head coverings. Social media allowed the protesters a platform to get their message out into the world. A prominent Iranian actress, Taraneh Alidoosti, posted multiple pictures of herself without a headscarf on Instagram with the caption 'Woman. Life. Freedom'.1 Women willfully unveiling in public spaces quickly became a symbol of defiance against the morality police, and the regime. As expected, acts of defiance such as unveiling in public in a political and religious climate, such as Iran's, comes with its own risks. Women and girls who have stepped out in public without a head covering have been arrested, beaten, and had items like yogurt dumped on their heads.2 Men have also been arrested and beaten for showing support for the cause.

Additionally, the Iranian authorities resorted to unprecedented levels of internet shutdowns in an attempt to silence dissent and isolate the Iranian people from the world. According to Filter.watch, an Iran-focused internet monitor, Iran experienced internet blackouts for over four months either nationwide, or at a provincial level after Mahsa Aminis death.3 Moreover, the government enacted legislation that allowed the government to monitor and identify individuals based on their online activity.

These measures are a part of the government's effort to curtail freedom of expression and access to the global online platform. A majority of Iranian users are either experiencing constant removal of their content or know at least one person who is being censored in the Persian language. The most common type of content that has been removed or shadowbanned are hashtags of human rights campaigns; comedians posting political satire; and activists organizations using chants like "death to Khamenei". Persian language news organizations have also had their content removed simply for discussing political organizations. Most of the content posted on Meta is in languages other than English, with more than a hundred languages being used on Facebook. This needs to be taken into account when assembling contextual embeddings. Meta needs to improve its Natural Language Processing (NLP), scaling it across more languages. Systems that detect and remove policy-violating content should then be trained accordingly.

Access to safe and well regulated social media platforms are essential for socio-political movements, making it essential for Meta to review its content moderation according to multiple regional, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Prior to content removal based solely on the judgment of automated classifiers, Meta should prioritize training manual moderators in understanding relevant complications tied to online content. This approach would allow human moderators to assess both media content and their accompanying captions in accordance to contextual cues, allowing for a more nuanced and accurate decision making process compared to evaluating them separately. Social media users ought to have the freedom to share content expressing their support for a cause or condemning harmful regimes and beliefs. This should be permitted without Meta's classifiers flagging it as a violation, even in cases where the language used may be deemed 'offensive.' It is important to note that offensive language can be used in non-offensive contexts, and hate speech does not always contain offensive language.

1 CNN, Leading Iranian actor posts picture without hijab in support of anti-government protests (CNN, 2022)
https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/10/middleeast/iran-taraneh-alidoosti-actor-hijab-intl

2 BBC NEWS, Iranian Women arrested for not covering hair after man attacks them with yogurt (BBC, 2023)
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-65150135

3 AWID, Iran's Year of Defiance and Repression: How One Woman's Death Sparked a

Nationwide Uprising (AWID, 2023)

https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/irans-year-defiance-and-repression-how-one-womans-death-sparked-nationwide

Link to Attachment

[PC-21007](PC-21007)

2023-32-IG-UA	PC-21008	United States & Canada
Case number	Public comment number	Region

Hannah	Van Dijcke	English
Commenter's first name	Commenter's last name	Commenter's preferred language

Human Rights Foundation		Yes
Organization		Response on behalf of organization

Full Comment

In its public comment on case 2023-032-IG-UA, the Human Rights Foundation (HRF) reinforces its recommendation that the bar for removing content at times of anti-regime demonstrations in authoritarian regimes must be especially high.

HRF recognizes that content that seriously threatens the safety of dissidents or political opponents can meet that bar in certain circumstances. In this case, however, it is the act of going out in public in Iran that puts women at risk of arrest and imprisonment, rather than an Instagram video showing unveiled women. What's more, the faces of unveiled Iranian women on social media are a powerful expression of unified regime defiance and are crucial for Iranians to learn about the arrest, detention, or killing of their loved ones.

HRF also advises the Board to recommend that Meta continues to invest in a more context-sensitive enforcement of its content moderation policies and to take measures to safeguard protestors' and dissidents' access to Instagram and Whatsapp in the ongoing protests in Iran.

Link to Attachment
[PC-21008](PC-21008)

2023-32-IG-UA

Case number

PC-21009

Public comment number

Central & South
Asia

Region

Sabhanaz Rashid

Commenter's first name

Diya

Commenter's last name

English

Commenter's preferred language

Tech Global
Institute

Organization

Yes

Response on behalf of
organization

Full Comment

In the face of stringent state regulation of conventional media in Iran, social media platforms assumed a critical role in the 2022 "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests. The participants of the movement utilized the medium for diverse purposes, offsetting lack of alternative resources for information sharing and coordination under authoritarian conditions. An appropriate framework for exploring the role of social media is through differentiating between posts that were directed at domestic and international communities which sought to accomplish different goals.

Posts catering to domestic audiences were predominantly in Persian, posted in Iran and centered around disseminating ground level intel. For example, the news of Masha Amini's death, which sparked protests around the country, was first reported by Niloofar Hamedi in a picture she posted on Twitter showing Amini's parents mourning at their daughter's death. This picture became the face of movement in its early days. Elahe Mohammadi covered the funeral ceremony and reported on the first public mobilization in Saqez town where the protests began. Although the "Woman, Life,

Freedom" slogan is not novel to the 2022 protests and has been used since the early 2000s by Kurdish Iranian women, it resurfaced at the funeral ceremony for Amini. The social media coverage of the protest resulted in this chant becoming the official call of the protesters. Once the protest started, Yalda Moaiery, a photojournalist, shared graphic visuals of retaliation by the state against the protesters. Content created by these and many more journalists/activists was widely shared across Instagram, Twitter and other social media sites which helped inform the public about what was going on and documented how the movement progressed.

During the protest in Saqez women took off their scarves, chanted against the government to which police retaliated by firing at the crowds, which went viral on social media. However, it is important to note that removing the scarf as a form of protest is not a novel occurrence and has a rich history in Iranian feminist protests. Videos of past protests were also commonly shared on social media during this time. Social media would have likely played a significant role in coordination efforts during the movement, however curfew-style mobile network disruptions, blackouts in hotspots and bans on social media limited its use in the said capacity. Within Farsi, mentions of Masha Amini fell within the Iranian social media ecosystem two weeks after the protests started. Despite these barriers, many Iranians depended on Telegram as a source of coordination which allowed anonymity due to a proxy feature in the app - however this remained limited due to internet outages.

On the other hand, posts targeting international audiences were largely in English and had a strong condemnation of the current Iranian government. Many Iranian journalists in the diaspora played an important role in amplifying the posts still coming out of Iran on social media. Videos of police brutality were common here. It could be argued that propagating such narratives did result in political actions. According to a Reuters report US, UK and EU imposed sanctions against Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) who played a key role in suppression of protests. Sanctions on the IRGC Cooperative Foundation and five of its board members, Deputy Minister of Intelligence and Security Naser Rashedi and four senior IRGC commanders in Iran were motivated to financially hurt alleged funders of oppression.

The choice to moderate images of women not wearing a hijab is significant and delicate. The potential dangers for individuals appearing in such images, including the risk of detention, are real and justified concerns for women in Iran. Nonetheless, the act of removing the hijab as a form of protest against governmental oppression has

deep roots in the Iranian feminist movement. Women engaging in this form of protest are conscious of the potential repercussions but deliberately engage in this act of defiance as a strategic opposition to authority. Images of this gesture are shared willingly, conveying solidarity and crafting a shared narrative. Yet, choosing to conceal these images of recognized resistance not only hinders the achievement of their intended goals, but also fails to diminish the risks these women confront.

The 1979 regime change resulted in laws that made wearing a hijab compulsory. This forced obligation, coupled with escalating restrictions on women's participation in various aspects of society, led to a growing sense of misrepresentation and disenchantment among many Iranian women. They felt that their identity and agency was being constrained by these regulations, which not only dictated their dress but also symbolised broader limitations on their freedoms and roles in society. This law was captured in the Islamic Penal Code of Iran which subjects women to "imprisonment from three months to one year and pay a fine of 1,500,000 to 6,000,000, and also be flogged up to 74 lashes" for not abiding by the dress code".

These severe laws are rigorously enforced, yet this should not solely dictate the actions of social media platforms. Moderating this content out of a superficial concern for the safety limits the main argument of the protesters. Removing the hijab (head scarves) as a symbolic defiance to the law has become a well known and well celebrated form of protest in Iran. In 2017, a picture gained prominence on Twitter which showed Vida Movahed standing on a utility box in an Iranian street without her hijab as a protest. This picture became viral and known as 'Girl of Enghelab Street'. When Vida was detained hashtag #دختر_خیابان_انقلاب_کجاست ("Where is the girl of Enghelab Street") became viral and many women reenacted the symbol of taking off their hijab across Iran. Throughout 2018 and 2019, more women protested against the hijab law by publicly removing their head scarves and were subsequently arrested. In 2018, up to 29 women were arrested during protests in 2018 against the hijab law.

Therefore, images of women without hijabs should be regarded as expressions of protest. These women, fully conscious of the risks involved, willingly embrace the added danger to demonstrate their solidarity with the movement and to inspire others to draw courage from their actions. In an interview with Reuters, the anonymous protesters asserted that they are aware of the government intelligence apparatus collecting information on them, yet they remain steadfast in their commitment to this form of protest. Since the 2022 protest, Iran has changed its ways of monitoring

compliance with this law. The presence of religious police on the streets has reduced substantially, however CCTV has been installed across the country. This intrusive and passive monitoring methodology will make each offender of the law more likely to be identified by the state. However, even in the wake of such developments, many activists have come forward and confessed that they will continue to protest by removing the hijab even if it leads to arrest.

Meta's content moderation policies therefore need to understand the nuances of the situation. Although the decision to moderate such content stems from a duty to safeguard users, in reality, it risks infringing on an organic and critical national movement. Women who choose to remove the hijab understand that the government can be monitoring these acts through their intelligence apparatus even if such content is not posted online. The content is shared on social media because of its ability to inspire masses and create a unified movement across the country. If social media platforms decide to remove this content, they will not necessarily protect the women who choose to take off their hijab, rather become a roadblocks to a deliberate symbol of protest.

There are longstanding criticisms of Meta's content moderation policies in Iran, particularly allegations of the policies favoring pro-government positions. In May 2022, a BBC investigation indicated that Islamic intelligence officers bribed content moderators to remove anti-government speech on Instagram. Meta denied these allegations and publicly confirmed that there are regular audits of their outsourced moderators. In recent months, Meta's content moderation in Iran has garnered fresh waves of criticism, particularly against the backdrop of the political situation in the country.

Firstly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is designated under Meta's Dangerous Organizations and Individuals (DOI) policy, however there are repeated allegations of inaccurate and inconsistent enforcement of related content. This can largely be attributed to under-investments and Persian language (Farsi) classifiers are not mature, nor adequately trained in dialects such as Dari, Achomi and Khunsari, that may also be used to express. As a result, hashtags condemning the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps are inaccurately blocked and activists experience account restrictions. We recommend that Meta conducts an independent audit and publishes the results of the precision of hostile speech classifiers in Farsi.

Secondly, Meta's Violence and Incitement policy have reportedly flagged rhetorical threats during protests in Iran. In January 2023, the Oversight Board overturned Meta's decision to remove "Death to Khamenei" indicating that the phrase was used as an expression of dissent. At the time, the Board recommended that Meta's policies be revised to protect speech during protests, however, in September 2022 feminist protests, civil society reported on similar over-enforcement of political dissent. It is therefore critical Meta amend its Violence and Incitement policies to reflect on local context and allow rhetorical threats during a defined period of time, i.e. during protests.

Thirdly, human rights groups fear that the Iranian regime often uses coordinated reporting to abuse Meta's system and take down content. While the volume of reporting typically does not have a bearing on content decisions, it is likely repeated reporting or false reporting can lead to incorrect enforcement. Therefore, it is important that Meta provides more transparency around its appeals process to ensure that activists can use scaled tools to appeal against inaccurate enforcement, and that these appeals are prioritized during a protest. Meta should also ensure there is human-in-the-loop when assessing appeals to ensure context is taken into account. This is especially important given how extensively social media is used, including via VPNs, by Iranian activists to respond to the country's political situation.

And lastly, we note that Meta prioritized safety of Iranian women and Instagram's classifiers flagged 'unveiled women' as a potential violation because of Meta's policies around it. While this may be true in certain contexts, it is imperative that Meta engages with regional teams and external civil society to issue policy exceptions during times of protest to ensure that its intent around safety does not inadvertently suppress necessary political dissent. In this instance, given the Iranian feminist movement focused heavily on pushing back on mandatory dress codes, Meta should have issued a time-bound policy exception to allow content showing unveiled women.

Link to Attachment

[PC-21009](#)

2023-32-IG-UA

Case number

PC-21010

Public comment number

Europe

Region

Withheld

Commenter's first name

Withheld

Commenter's last name

English

Commenter's preferred language

ARTICLE 19

Organization

Yes

Response on behalf of organization

Full Comment

-

Link to Attachment

[PC-21010](PC-21010)

2023-32-IG-UA

Case number

PC-21011

Public comment number

United States & Canada

Region

Elise

Commenter's first name

Baker

Commenter's last name

Arabic

Commenter's preferred language

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the Atlantic Council's Strategic Litigation Project, and the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law

Organization

Yes

Response on behalf of organization

Full Comment

Unveiled Iranian women's content should remain on Meta platforms as its removal could enable the Islamic Republic to suppress women's protests advocating for gender equality, individual autonomy, and freedom of choice in Iran. Additionally, such content has significant evidentiary value in documenting the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests, promoting accountability, and upholding the principles of transparency and free speech.

I.   Protesters and Participants in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement Have Effectively Used Social Media Platforms for Digital Campaigning, with Images of Unveiled Women Playing a Vital Role.

The "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement has been formed around the idea of dismantling oppressive and unjust laws enforced by the Islamic Republic against Iranian women, including mandatory hijab. The Iranian regime has effectively stifled all peaceful forms of protest, leaving Iranian women with few avenues to voice their grievances. The action of removing compulsory hijab in public, carried out by countless Iranian women despite the threat of severe punishment, stands as a courageous declaration of their discontent with mandatory hijab and a resolute demand for their rights and the freedom to make choices in Iran.

The abundance of content featuring unveiled Iranian women posted and circulated on Meta social media networks has provided a platform for protestors and participants in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement to highlight the extensive hardships confronting women in Iran. This includes the brutal enforcement of compulsory hijab by the Islamic Republic, which led to the custodial death of Mahsa Jina Amini due to what is referred to as "improper hijab," in addition to hundreds of other civilians who perished during the ensuing protests. Moreover, dozens of Iranian women have utilized Meta platforms to share their personal narratives and perspectives, including those who were arrested or suffered life-altering physical injuries during the protests. Their resilience sends a compelling message of empowerment and serves as a source of inspiration for others confronting similar obstacles.

The utilization of images depicting unveiled Iranian women has played a pivotal role in amplifying their voices, dismantling stereotypes, humanizing their struggles, and offering a more comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives within the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. These visuals have reached a global audience and mobilized support for the movement.

II.   Removing "Woman, Life, Freedom" Content from Meta Platforms Would Serve to Silence the Voices of Brave Iranian Activists and Remove Evidence Essential to Ensuring Accountability for Violations Against Activists.

Removing content that includes images of unveiled Iranian women would further suppress their voices, as the global audience would be denied the opportunity to witness the challenges faced by these courageous women. With already limited means for activism in Iran, foreclosing online avenues would further limit their freedom of expression, a fundamental human right.

Moreover, removing this online content may allow the Islamic Republic to evade accountability. Digital content showing unveiled protesters and action taken against them by Iranian security forces has high evidentiary value. It can serve as direct evidence of human rights violations, including identification of those responsible. Removing this content from Meta platforms would make this vital documentation inaccessible to rights organizations advocates and accountability mechanisms. A coalition of organizations, including the signatories of this response, are working to preserve publicly posted digital documentation of protest-related violence in Iran, to analyze its evidentiary value and ensure it can be utilized in future accountability processes. The coalition is actively working to preserve content posted on Meta platforms. Removal of such content, prior to its identification and preservation by external actors, would undermine efforts to ensure accountability for the violations committed against protesters in Iran.

III.   The Nature and Gravity of the Risks Associated with Circulating Pictures or Videos on Social Media Showing Unveiled Women in Iran Do Not Justify Their Removal from Meta Platforms.

Empowered by Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code, the Islamic Republic employs various methods, including advanced technologies and morality police patrols, to identify and apprehend individuals who defy compulsory hijab. Women whose images circulate on Meta platforms without wearing the compulsory hijab may face serious consequences, including fines, imprisonment, or physical punishment.

The Islamic Republic's officials have employed different tactics to trace dissenters and participants in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement on social media. These tactics include extensive online surveillance using sophisticated methods, blocking access to

social media platforms and encrypted messaging apps, cyber espionage, infiltrating popular social media accounts, deploying online forces known as "soft war officers" to harass dissidents and report on them, disseminating disinformation and propaganda to discredit dissenting movements, and arresting individuals based on their social media posts and online activities. Furthermore, Islamic Republic officials also orchestrate mass reporting campaigns using the user reporting system to pressure social media companies into removing content related to dissidents or placing them into shadow bans, citing safety violations or threats to national security as pretexts.

Despite the risks posed by publication of images identifying unveiled women, removing such content is not the most appropriate course of action for the reasons discussed above. Instead, other measures can be taken to ensure the safety and protection of Iranian women while also upholding freedom of expression and ensuring preservation of evidence. Meta could consider implementing measures or tools aimed at safeguarding the safety and anonymity of these women, such as blurring faces of unveiled women. Any such measures should be taken in consultation with Iranian women and civil society, as discussed below.

Furthermore, Meta should establish clear guidelines for distinguishing content intended to raise awareness and advocate for women's rights in Iran from other content that might raise valid privacy concerns. Achieving this would require a deeper understanding of the political context and dynamics in Iran. Meta needs to align its content moderation policies with international human rights standards—in particular freedom of expression, evidence preservation, and the right to privacy—and consider the unique challenges faced by users in Iran.

IV.   Meta's Content Moderation Policies for Persian-language Expression Related to the Political Situation in Iran Must Strike a Delicate Balance Among Safeguarding Freedom of Expression, Preserving Content with Evidentiary Value, and Protecting Users from Harm.

Meta's content moderation policies concerning Persian-language expression in the context of Iran's political situation should strike a delicate balance between safeguarding freedom of expression, preserving content with evidentiary value, and protecting users from harm. This approach necessitates alignment with international human rights standards and a nuanced understanding of Iran's unique political landscape. It is also essential that any approach be adaptable to the ever-changing

political dynamics to maintain a contextual understanding.

Any policies adopted by Meta that are specific to content moderation in Iran should be developed in consultation with the Iranian user community, local experts, and human rights organizations.

Users should also have access to transparent guidelines that distinctly outline what constitutes acceptable and prohibited content. Additionally, there should be a robust and transparent content appeals process in place to promptly address user concerns.

Considering the grim human rights record of the Islamic Republic, Meta must prioritize the safety and privacy of users engaged in political activity. This commitment involves establishing effective mechanisms for users to report instances of harassment, intimidation, or threats. Lastly, Meta should employ strategies to detect and mitigate the dissemination of disinformation and propaganda related to Iran's political situation.

Link to Attachment

No Attachment