



## Beyond Greed – Protecting Human Rights Online

April 2019

*“The sexual abuse of children is criminal behaviour that is totally abhorrent and unacceptable.”  
Resolution of the Uniting Church National Assembly Standing Committee meeting of March 2013  
(ASC Minute 13.07.03)*

As technology has developed it has improved our ability to share information and be more connected. This has created many positive outcomes in our lives, but also has its negative side. It has also provided new tools to those that seek to do harm to others, including those who engage in child sexual abuse. New technologies have allowed those engaged in child sexual abuse to network with each other like never before, and to be able to conceal the abuse and harm they cause from the police. Last year the Australian Federal Police received about 18,000 reports of child sexual abuse material being accessed by Australians. This includes a growing number of cases where Australians connect with human traffickers in the Philippines via social media to arrange for the live streaming of a child being sexually abused. In these cases a web camera located in the Philippines is used to stream live video of a child being subjected to sexual abuse with the Australian giving real time instructions on what abuse should be carried out. Hundreds of Australians have been detected involved in this abuse, with any single Australian paedophile paying for hundreds of sessions of abuse over the course of a number of years. A single session of child sexual abuse can cost as little as \$20.

Unfortunately, in some cases people engaged in child sexual abuse have been aided by the actions of technology businesses. Mostly, this is driven by greed. Assisting the police comes at a cost to the profits of these businesses, so some would rather not have to assist and only do so if compelled to do so by the law.

The multinational technology corporations also skimp on having enough staff to screen content being uploaded to their platforms and removing it in a timely manner. There has been very public criticism of social media corporations by the Prime Ministers of both Australia and New Zealand for these corporations not having done enough to remove the live streaming of a massacre of people in two mosques in Christchurch by the terrorist carrying out the attack.

In our Christian faith we understand that greed is malevolent because greed obtains unneeded wealth for one's self at the expense of another. Thomas Aquinas put it this way, greed “is a sin directly against one's neighbour, since one man cannot over-abound in external riches, without another man lacking them.” The Uniting Church has also committed itself to the struggle against child sexual abuse, both within the churches and the wider community.

We have been attempting to engage with some of the multinational technology corporations to clarify their policies on how they address human rights abuses that are facilitated by their platforms. While Facebook has been helpful, Google has not responded to our requests for clarification of their policies and practices. So we are requesting that you write to them asking for clarification of their policies and requesting some change in the way they operate. Both corporations do report some cases of child sexual abuse to law enforcement.

The 2018 documentary, ‘The Cleaners’ (<http://www.gebrueder-beetz.de/en/productions/the-cleaners>), has exposed how technology companies are exploiting people in the Philippines to screen social media and remove abusive material, including child sexual abuse material. These people reported they are expected to look at up to 25,000 images a day and get inadequate psychological support for being exposed to images of the worst depravity human beings are capable of. The Filipino content managers also reported destroying the online evidence of child sexual abuse without referring it to police, destroying vital evidence that could assist police in rescuing children from on-going abuse.

The key concerns we have with the social media technology corporations are:

- Destruction of evidence of human rights abuses without reporting it to law enforcement agencies;

- Claiming that data is not located where the user of their service is, which forces police to have to seek warrants from overseas courts, which can take months;
- Not preserving evidence of human rights abuse by allowing users to destroy evidence they have previously posted;
- Obstructing reasonable requests from police investigating human rights abuses through the use of court processes in cases where it is clear there is serious human rights violations occurring;
- Not responding quickly enough in removing posts where people are organising human rights abuses or terrorist attacks; and
- In the case of Google, tipping off human rights abusers they are under investigation, when law enforcement presents a warrant for information about the person, unless forbidden from doing so by a court.

We are seeking to clarify to what extent the different multinational technology corporations are engaged in these activities.

*The Financial Times* reported that videos and images of children being sexually abused were being openly shared on Facebook's WhatsApp on a vast scale. Israeli researchers warned Whatsapp that it was easy to find and join dozens of chat groups where people were sharing images and videos of children being sexually abused. In one case, one of these groups had 256 members.

After the Federal election we will be inviting you to join our campaign for laws to address gaps in the existing law that mean the multinational technology corporations do not have to assist in reasonably curbing the use of their products to facilitate human rights abuses, including child sexual abuse.

### **What You Can Do**

Google is highly secretive making it difficult for people to express concerns to them about their policies, with their online communication channels being almost exclusively for the assistance in the use of their products. Thus you will need to write them a letter in order for your concerns to be heard.

Ms Melanie Silva  
 CEO  
 Google  
 48 Pirrama Road  
 Sydney, NSW 2009

Salutation: Dear Ms Silva

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at testimony of Filipino content managers in the documentary *The Cleaners* that they destroy evidence of child sexual abuse without it being reported to law enforcement agencies.
- Ask if Google or any of its associated entities subcontract content management to the Philippines.
- Ask if Google and its associated entities and any contractors and subcontractors report all child sexual abuse material they detect to law enforcement agencies when such content is new (has not been seen by Google before).
- Express concern that Google has a public policy of advising customers they are under investigation by law enforcement when law enforcement requests data about the customer, unless a court order prohibits the company from doing so. Ask if there are any crime types for which Google would not disclose to a customer they are under investigation.
- Ask if Google takes any steps to prevent customers from destroying evidence of criminal human rights abuses after Google informs them they are under investigation.

For Facebook use their help centre at:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/community/ask/>

Ask what steps WhatsApp is taking to remove and report child sexual abuse material to police.

Ask if their Filipino subcontractor content managers are required to preserve and report to police any child sexual abuse material they detect, like Facebook's own content managers are required to do.

Please let us know of any replies you get to your letters on online questions.