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| Speak Up - Kōrerotia  The Christchurch Call and violent extremist content online  24 August 2021 | |
| Female | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana,  E ngā reo,  E ngā hau e whā  Tēnā koutou katoa  Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.    Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.  Ko te hōtaka reo irirangi “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”. Ko Sally Carlton ahau.  Today we’re going to be talking about “The Christchurch Call and violent extremist content online”. This is a topic of particular importance and meaning, I think, to us here in Ōtautahi Christchurch. The Christchurch Call came about as a response to the 15th March 2019 attacks on worshippers at two mosques, which were livestreamed by the gunman on social media.  This show is going to be divided in two parts. The first will be an interview with District Commander Superintendent John Price, who will talk us through some details about this topic from the perspective of the New Zealand Police, and then we’ll move into a panel discussion with Anjum Rahman from Inclusive Aotearoa, Jordan Carter from InternetNZ and Christchurch Mayor, Lianne Dalziel.  John, thank you so much for coming onto this show. To start with, could you please tell us about your interest in participating. Why is the topic important to you, and to the New Zealand Police more broadly? |
| John | Thank you Sally, firstly ko John Price ahau, nō Waitaha ahau. Look, this topic is really important for us in the New Zealand Police. One, because we’re there to serve our community. New Zealand Police are there as a service organisation to ensure that all New Zealanders in Aotearoa will be safe and feel safe and the Christchurch Call is an opportunity for us to value the diversity of our community, embrace what is good about community and ensure that hatred and all those things that are abhorrent to us as the community, can be stopped.  Everyone in New Zealand, in Aotearoa, has the right to live in a peaceful, caring, kind community and we’re part of that community. |
| Sally | Thank you John. The impact of the 15th of March attacks on police, individual to the police and also as an organisation - I’m interested in hearing any perspective you’ve got on that. |
| John | The 15th of March, first of all, was a terrible tragedy for our community, especially for our Muslim community who were simply there at the respective mosques, praying in peace and then that peace is shattered through an evil act of hatred. We have a saying that the public are the police and the police are the public. That’s a quote that goes back to 1829 where we basically are saying that police are the public, we are all members of the community and when hurt and hatred occurs in our community, it impacts on us as well.  I know myself and as a police officer, we are the guardians of the people, we are the peacemakers - and if that peace is shattered or we fail to provide good guardianship, protection and care, it does cut to the very core of who we are as police. So as individuals, yes, certainly it impacts on us. As an organisation, again, our why is simply to ensure that New Zealand will be the safest country. Every single day when our people come to work, we strive for that vision that we have.  We also strive for the purpose of ensuring that everyone in Aotearoa, no matter who you are, where you’ve come from, what you think, you are valued and that you must feel safe and be safe and that’s no matter if it’s on our roads, on our streets, in our homes or in places in worship. Everyone has the right to feel that way and you know, this Christchurch Call for us is an opportunity to prevent crime, harm, through some exceptional policing and we’ll do that in partnership with our wonderful agencies in our community. |
| Sally | John, how is the police involved in the Christchurch Call as an institution? |
| John | Well firstly, we support that Call, we support that cause, we support its intent. I think the core for this is we are there to support, we’re not there to lead. The Christchurch Call is all about a community-led focus and we’re part of that community. So we will be there alongside those community members who have the ideas, the seeds that they can plant that can grow and hopefully we’ll be part of that. |
| Sally | I hope that’s the case as well. What is the role of the New Zealand Police in terms of working towards minimising or containing or controlling or at least trying to do some of these things, in terms of violent extremist content online? |
| John | The role of the New Zealand Police is to work in partnership with other key agencies, you know, we’ve obviously got a focus around information - understanding what that information says, making sense of it, understanding who, what, how and why this information is coming online. We will add value to that so we’ve got some intelligence. If there are people out there who want to use online violence and we want to stop it, whether or not violence is a face-to-face thing, whether or not violence is something that occurs in a public place - the virtual online space is just as bad. You know, so any opportunities to stop that… we do not want ideologies that are not part of the way of being in New Zealand.  Ideologies can spread, people’s thoughts can spread and that’s good if they’re great, good, well-balanced thoughts. But if they’re thoughts that are actually going to expose people to behaving in a violent way, no one wants that. So our role is to work with other agencies to stop that from occurring.  What we’d really, really like to be able to do is to prevent it in the first place. Our operating model is prevention first. So what we’d want to be able to do is rather than react or respond to something, to prevent it. So education becomes really important, education before enforcement. |
| Sally | And trying to provide that social wraparound as well, I imagine. |
| John | Yes absolutely and to ensure that if people are victimised through intent in the online environment, we want to be able to protect our victims from that as well. So no one has the right to cause harm to anyone either online or face to face. |
| Sally | Just before we move onto our panel discussion with the other guests which unfortunately the timing didn’t work out and you weren’t able to join that kōrero, but just as we wind our interview up, what are some of the big themes or the big challenges of this topic that you think the other guests are likely to touch on? |
| John | Well I think one of the core things is the fundamentals and the foundation for this is around respect for everyone. I think everyone needs to be able to show respect for everyone as a community, value that diversity that we have, you know. What makes us special is the diversity within our community, we need to honour that, we need to put that up in lights and actually speak to it and we also need to find ways of speaking out against things that are not right. Hatred, anything that would minimise people’s ability to be the best they can be, is a real worry for us.  What I want to do is see the 15th of March for what it was, it was the worst day in our community. But what I’d like to do is to turn that and see if the 15th of March can be the seed for something that happens really well and really good for our community. So I’d like to see the panel, along with us, seeing how we can do this in partnership. How can we work alongside and with each other to make a better Aotearoa. Why? Because it’s the right thing to do. Nau mai, haere mai, tēna koutou, tēna koutou, tēna koutou katoa, kia kaha New Zealand. |
| Sally | Thank you John and I really, really love that idea of putting diversity up in lights, I think that was a lovely expression. |
| John | Thank you very much Sally, you too, keep up the wonderful work and the conversation is the way to go forward, isn’t it. |
| Sally | Definitely, exactly, yes, conversation. |
| John | Lovely. |
| Sally | Okay we’ve got now Cat Stevens’ ‘Peace Train’ which has special meaning for this conversation. |
|  | **MUSIC BY CAT STEVENS – PEACE TRAIN** |
| Sally | Ko “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” tēnei. To talk us through the Christchurch Call, what is it and also what’s been happening in the wider space of extremism online, we have three guests, we’ve got Lianne Dalziel, our Christchurch Mayor, we’ve got Anjum Rahman who is part of Inclusive Aotearoa and Jordan Carter, CEO of InternetNZ. So three people who will be bringing a real diverse range of perspectives to this topic. I’d like you all to please tell us a wee bit about yourselves, why you’re involved today. Perhaps Anjum, we’ll start with you. |
| Anjum | Kia ora koutou. I’d just to begin by acknowledging mana whenua and where I am, that’s Tainui Waka and acknowledging the Kingitanga. So my involvement has been, at the moment I’m a Co-Chair of the Christchurch Call Advisory Network and I’m also on the Independent Advisory Committee of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism which is known as GIFCT. Yeah, I guess I got involved after the Christchurch attack, was invited to consultation meetings and then ended up going to New York in September 2019 to attend the follow up event after the France event in May.  And I’ve long had interests around hate speech, hate crimes and safety and so it was a really a good fit for me in terms of that. |
| Sally | Fantastic and you’ve already introduced so many of the themes that I think we’ll probably delve into more as we go forward. Jordan, can we hear from you now. |
| Jordan | Sure, kia ora everyone. My name is Jordan Carter, I’m the Chief Executive of InternetNZ which is an NGO based in Wellington. We run the dot nz domain name system but we have a vision of the internet being a force for good and for everyone and as part of the work that we do, we’re involved in internet policy discussions both in New Zealand and through the global environment.  And so when the events happened in Christchurch, the attacks in March 2019, we were one of a set of organisations that the government came and talked to about the Christchurch Call idea and I was really privileged to be asked to convene the civil society aspect of the summit that was held in Paris launching the Call in 2019.  Our sort of role as an organisation is try and connect the discussion about terrorists and violent extremist content to the ways that internet issues are discussed and resolved on a global level and to try and hold out a forum in New Zealand for those voices to get in touch with the government as well in the lead-up to the Christchurch Call Summit in May 2019. So that’s kind of my interest here.  I’m a participant in the Christchurch Call Advisory Network as well and have been since its founding, that Anjum is one of the Co-Chairs of. |
| Sally | Fantastic, that’s a wealth of experience, goodness. Jordan, just a simple question I suppose: you mentioned that InternetNZ controls the dot nz domain, what exactly does that mean? What kind of control do you have over groups setting up websites and that sort of thing, closing them down, I guess, as well? |
| Jordan | So think of us as like the wholesale provider of the service, there are about 725,000 people have got domain names like Stuff.co.nz, anything that ends in a dot nz on the internet comes through our services and we have 80 or 90 channel partners that sell those registrations to the public. So we don’t get to choose who uses the service or not, it’s a very open service, people just come along and register the names they want to use. |
| Sally | Thank you and finally, our esteemed Mayor who is sitting next to me here in the studio. |
| Lianne | Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak. I guess I’m here in my role as the Mayor of Ōtautahi Christchurch which was where the terrorist attacks occurred on March 15, 2019. The lead up to the attacks was something that the Royal Commission focused on, but what happened in the immediate aftermath was something that our city was very focused on. The Prime Minister advised that there would be an announcement on the negotiation of the Christchurch Call at the time that it was being finalised. So I don’t have the sort of specific sort of views to be bringing to this discussion but as the Mayor of the city at the time that this happened, I think that I can contribute to a conversation about why this is so important.  The internet I think, you know, and I reflect back to the fact that Facebook only started in 2004, you know. That wasn’t that long ago and you know, when you think about the extent of the influence that it has today, then that is significant. So we’ve seen a, sort of an exponential increase in capacity and the promise of the internet was the democratisation of access to information, that was the promise and what we all felt was so brilliant.  But at the same time, it has opened an uncontrollable means of spreading vast volumes of disinformation and fuelling hate on platforms that accept or seemingly accept no responsibility or accountability for the consequences of amplifying these messages. So I guess that’s the part of the conversation that I’m very keen to be part of. |
| Sally | Great thank you. So as we begin our discussion then, I think it would be great to think about what is it that has prompted the Christchurch - and we’ve obviously all mentioned the 15th March 2019 and the terror attack that was the driving force, the reason behind it - but it was obviously much bigger than that. Lianne, you’ve just touched on the fact the internet is huge, it’s all about democratisation, but how can that be used and mis-used as well. But what was the actual genesis of the Christchurch Call? How did it come about in the days and the weeks following those terror attacks? |
| Lianne | Well I know that the Prime Minister was already thinking about it in the early days because I spoke to her about the need to reach out to the internet companies and they were already doing that but I think Anjum probably has more to offer in terms of that direct connection than I do. |
| Anjum | That’s quite correct, Lianne. I think in terms of the Christchurch mosque attacks, the key factor there was the livestream video that led to this. So that video was uploaded and it was available and watched while the events were happening but subsequently shared, modified and posted and I think Facebook said they took down 1.24 million copies of that video posted on their platform. It was the viralality and the ability of the killer to use Facebook Live and bypass whatever mechanisms that they had at the time.  You are right, there was already a concern around violent extremist content and that kind of came up around the time when you had the beheading videos that were going up from ISIS and so the companies were already concerned about limiting or removing that content. But the ability of the Christchurch killer to really make something go that viral that fast was one of the major genesis points. |
| Jordan | There was a sort of very logical horrified reaction to say how can a tool of live broadcast to the world, be available with nothing to stop something like this happening. Because there was no argument in anyone’s mind that this kind of video is beyond the pale, right, it’s illegal content in New Zealand and anywhere that’s got speech laws. It’s so far outside the rules of the so called Facebook Community Guidelines that it’s like, it’s absolutely wrong content to have online and the taking down of it continues to this day, versions or snippets of this video are still out in various corners of the internet.  And so I think the genesis was, firms were going gosh, we have to respond to this and the governments were saying we cannot continue with this sort of almost dangerous technology in some ways, being available and I think other point about the genesis was you know, often governments, when something bad happens, will leap into legislator mode and they’ll try and pass laws to circumscribe what happens. I think the Australian government did that quite shortly after the Christchurch attacks and they passed some laws in the heat of an election campaign over there that were about sort of criminalising executives and imposing big fines if this kind of content was on these platforms.  And I think New Zealand sort of went well, we’re a small country, we can’t necessarily force these companies to do what we’d like them to do but what we can do is engage in a dialogue with them and set out a vision of the different way of the internet working. And so the Christchurch Call thing sort of acknowledged that we had a responsibility to help do something because of what had happened in Christchurch, and the kind of moral force behind the PM’s ability to sort of strongarm some of these companies and to work with other countries to pull together a call for things to be different, to eliminate this kind of content online. Practical changes than if we’d just sort of gone into a New Zealand only, let’s pass some laws, let’s smack them on the back of the hands type thing. |
| Anjum | Yeah I think the power was in the collective action - I just want to pick up what Jordan is saying with New Zealand being a small country - but when a group of countries team up and when we can have civil society participants also teaming up and working together with a group of companies, not just each individual company, then the ability to take meaningful action becomes that much more. It also becomes so much more fraught because you have different cultural perspectives, different legislative systems, complexity of working in a global environment, all of those things. So quite fun times. |
| Sally | Yes I bet. So this brings me nicely into my next question actually is what is the Christchurch Call and who is part of it? |
| Anjum | It’s a range of commitments that are required for companies and governments that they are signing up to and the wording of that commitment is on the Christchurch Call website. But it is really, really tight. So the commitments are quite narrow in focus and scope and the Prime Minister explained that that was done because there is such a small area where everyone agrees that this shouldn’t happen and as soon as you move out of that area, you start getting a whole huge disagreement. So why not start with the bits that everyone agrees on. And so the commitments are based around that. |
| Jordan | I was just browsing the text of it which is on a website called christchurchcall.com - people can pop on there and check the wording out - and it is, it’s exactly what you’ve said, Anjum. It has some commitments that governments would take about dealing with the drivers of terrorist and violent extremist action, ensuring that there’s effective enforcement of laws about it, trying to encourage media outlets to apply ethical standards - because you might remember that a British newspaper website actually posted this video on its main public site for a while, whereas the New Zealand media were much more appropriate, respectful, dignified and not doing that kind of thing - consider appropriate action to prevent the use of online services. So there’s, like, five or six concrete commitments that governments made and then commitments that the online service providers made and some joint commitments between the two, including committing to working with civil society and developing effective interventions to deal with this problem and to do more research, it’s two or three pages of calls and commitments.  And over the couple of years since it’s been founded, I think there are now 60 supporter countries listed who have joined up altogether and all the big companies you might think of and some… so the Googles, the Facebook, YouTube, Microsoft, Twitter, Amazon is there, Daily Motion, so there’s those and there’s maybe 50 or 60 organisation in the civil society network as well, Anjum, I think. It started out small, New Zealand and France together sort of sparked the idea and organised the Summit and I think 19 countries signed up at that first Summit and it’s grown from there and the United States came on in time for the second anniversary Summit that was held in May this year. |
| Sally | Great thank you very much. So this has been a great introduction to what is the Christchurch Call and just finally as we finish off this first segment, as you as InternetNZ and you as Inclusive Aotearoa and I guess Christchurch as a city, that’s sort of maybe not signed up but is nonetheless behind it in spirit, what do we actually need to do if we are part of this collective that’s signed up to the Christchurch Call? |
| Anjum | Yeah that’s an interesting question. So in terms of the advisory network, when you start something new it takes time for it to embed, for people to get to know each other, to build the relationships and create trust. But I think one of the firm commitments from the civil society side is 1) as upholding human rights as bringing the perspectives of communities that are impacted, by the actions of government and by the operations of platforms.  And so we see our role, I think, mostly around advocating, providing good advice, raising issues and generally pushing both companies and governments. Because governments across the globe, they often sit in a space where in some countries they’re requiring removal of content where people are dissenting, they often use their powers in a political way and while they commit to human rights, not always wonderful at upholding them at a practical level.  Of course tech companies working in a private sector environment, their first allegiance is shareholders and to their bottom line and so that is a strong driver and motivator in terms of their actions and so having that community, civil society voice to push against those and really sit in that space of OK, what about the impacts you’re having on people by what you’re doing either through legislation, community standards, take downs, all of those things. Being in those conversations is really, really important. |
| Jordan | There’s some practical things that have come… so the Advisory Network as an example can offer input to governments if they’re looking at policies to make sure that they get that balance, right, that Anjum was talking about. One of the priority pieces of work after the Summit was held in 2019 was to put together a crisis response protocol so that if there were future incidents like this, there’d be a pre-agreed pathway for information exchange to happen between governments and companies, law enforcement, civil society and so on, so as to deal with the problem more quickly and more effectively.  That led to a workshop actually in Wellington, I think it was in December 2019, and that drew 200 plus people from a bunch of countries and a bunch of the Advisory Network voices. So that’s part of the modus operandi, the civil society network controls the joining of new members and France and New Zealand as the founders, I think, of the Call, deal with countries who are expressing an interest or companies who are expressing an interest to come along and join.  And the condition is that they have to actually support what’s in the Call. There’s some countries that couldn’t sign up to the Christchurch Call because it talks about the importance of a free, open and secure internet and protecting human rights - and probably without doing too much thinking, you can imagine some countries that would, if they said they were going to do that, you’d sort of cock an eyebrow and go well, your behaviour doesn’t really seem to be in line with that.  And once you’re in, it’s up to you to raise your voice I think, to offer your perspectives when things are happening, to participate in the summits and the various work that is there under the Action Plan. |
| Lianne | I suppose I’d like to read the first commitment because I think this explains why I think that an opening really is to extend the Christchurch Call to cities rather than just to government: Counter the drivers of terrorism and violent extremism by strengthening the resilience and inclusiveness of our societies, to enable them to resist terrorist and violent extremist ideologies including through education, building media literacy to help counter distorted terrorist and violent extremist narratives and the fight against inequality.  So I’d never heard of the dark web before the 15th March and what I find it contains is misogynist, racist, bitter and twisted revisionist history views that have no place in a modern society and certainly doesn’t support any one of those things - resilience or inclusiveness. People spoke of the terrorist as being a lone wolf. No, these individuals, in terms of the action on the day, are never alone and that’s where they find their sense of belonging, in a community that they can’t see, can’t touch, can’t feel, but which supports this very distorted view of the world.  And this kind of approach, building resilience and inclusiveness, does not happen from central government, it happens within communities, and I think local governments really do need to see themselves as playing a strong leadership role with their local communities.  I went to the launch of a community-led initiative which I think contributes to this approach, the Christchurch Invitation. It’s different from the Christchurch Call. The Invitation which is something you can accept, is to spread peace, to reconnect, to share food and to reflect, and I think all of these are based on principles that come from the Qur’an but they also come from every religion and they come from an expression of humanity.  So I think the community itself knows the answers to some of the ways that we can build those but they are at the local level. |
| Anjum | And I’d like to support that because in terms of the Christchurch Call at the government level, there’s the international aspect of the Call but there’s also a domestic aspect of the Call and that domestic work, yeah, I agree with Lianne, it does have to reach out into communities and using local governments is an excellent platform for that. |
| Jordan | It’s a suggestion that Anjum and I could raise with New Zealand and France on the next call of the Advisory Network. |
| Sally | I’d love to see Christchurch as an official part of it. |
| Lianne | Actually Sadiq Khan, I met with him in 2019 and they had literally just released their own report which had been off the back off the sort of biggest listening programme that they had ever undertaken. It was a comprehensive city-wide listening programme that actually called on communities that often didn’t contribute to engagement exercises with the city and the report is called *A Shared Endeavour: Working in partnership to counter violent extremism in London* and it absolutely reflects all our own experiences over a number of years, probably starting with the earthquakes, that it is by working in partnership that we get real change happening and we get community ownership which is going to be core critical to taking people with us. |
| Sally | We’re going to have our song now, this is from Pakastani rock group Junoon. They create music that is supposed to bridge cultures between western culture and Pakastani culture with a view at the end of the day, to try and minimise terrorist violence. So this seems like an appropriate song for today’s show. |
|  | **MUSIC BY JUNOON** |
| Sally | This is “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” and today we’re discussing the Christchurch Call and violent extremism online. Talking about violent extremism online, what actually are we talking about here? Lianne, you’ve touched on the dark web but how does violent extremism content differ to terrorist content? - I believe there’s a slight difference there - and do we have any sense of just how much we’re talking? How big is the dark web? The side of the internet that we might not necessarily see every day. |
| Anjum | I’d like to begin with actually the fact that both in GIFCT and the Christchurch Call, definitions of these terms are hugely contested and there is not a single agreed upon international definition of terrorism or of violent extremism and I was kind of looking at some of the definitions around.  So terrorism seems to be a part of violent extremism and some of the definitions talk about having an extreme ideology and targeting particularly religious beliefs, ethnic differences, political ideologies to legitimise their actions and recruit and retain followers.  There is that intention to have an impact beyond the people that you’re just targeting. So you target a group of people to terrorise another group of people and get them to act in some way and it’s interesting at the moment that in New Zealand we have a Counter Terrorism Bill that is actually seeking to water down the definitions of terrorism - I certainly submitted on that, I know the Human Rights Commission has as well, it was another member of the Christchurch Call who has put in some really good advice around this - but they want to water down the meaning of terrorism from “causing terror in a civilian population” to “causing fear in a population” and from “duly compel a government or international organisation to do something”, to “coerce an organisation or government to do something”.  And that’s really concerning because we know that nobody has been successfully tried under our Terrorism Suppression Act and the one example where it might have been used, Operation 8, the fact that they couldn’t use this Act to charge people is actually a good thing given that the police had to apologise for the whole thing. So I don’t know that there’s a justification for changing this wording and certainly the experts that I’ve talked to - and I’ve talked to a number - have a lot of concern around that. |
| Jordan | I don’t have a lot to add on that topic because this is like well outside my paygrade. I think the Call is about the digital manifestations of this stuff. As a non-expert here, one of the key questions is who decides who is a terrorist and in what context is someone seen as a terrorist or an action seen as terrorism versus another context in which it isn’t.  And part of the challenge here is, you know, sometimes aspects of these are seen online and you *want* that digital content. So if it’s a news story about the problem, you don’t want that to be accidently blocked off and taken off the internet or if it’s an academic research piece into the content. So there are lots of complexities around the amount so I think that was one of the other questions you were going to come to, is how much of it is there - and my short answer there is I don’t know.  It seems like there’s less of it than there was, partly because of some of the actions that are taken under the Call, that’s my impression from some of the stuff that I’ve heard. But I think Anjum, you’ll have a better take on that because of your involvement with GIFCT. |
| Anjum | I want to pick up on some of the things Jordan has said. So if we think about violent content for example. So we had the video of the murder of George Floyd, that was eight or nine minutes of video content and that was not taken down, right, and you can say that’s violent content, it should be taken down. There were issues around footage from Syria of really violent crimes, YouTube took down, like, literally tens of thousands of videos that were evidence of war crimes so we don’t know where they are, if they’re stored anywhere, what happens to them if any of these people get to the International Criminal Court that evidence is lost.  So simply the fact that it is footage of violence and terrorist violence is not enough for a take down in a lot of cases and that is, you know, one of the problems when dealing with this area. One thing that I will say is that state terrorism, state violence is not included in the Christchurch Call and that’s a huge gap because all the definitions of terrorism and violent extremism are sitting in the space of people in communities doing those acts or groups and organisations doing this acts.  One of the problems with international definitions is that they don’t look at behaviours, they look at organisations, and so they have these designated lists. The UN has this designated sanctions list, almost all of the organisations are linked to Al Qaeda, ISIS, Taliban – none of those lists include alt right, neo Nazi, white supremacist, white nationalist groups, they are not on that list and in fact, most countries don’t have those groups on the list which shows the real limitation on the definitions that you have there.  It's incredibly problematic, it’s incredibly problematic. So if we look at practical examples with definitions: you look at Hong Kong and the government, the Chinese government as well, you know, the royals in Hong Kong talking about protestors as terrorists, Uighurs being talked about terrorists. You look at what’s happening in Myanmar, India and many other countries around the world where governments are deciding that legitimate resistance is terrorism. That’s where there’s a real hesitancy from companies to take any government-designated lists because they know that governments have vested interests and you can’t rely on those lists in a global sense.  So it’s very fraught in terms of the definitions, in terms of the practical applications and the resistance to even talk about or deal with state or state-sponsored terrorism. In terms of take-down content, I did look up some numbers. So I was looking at an article in August 2020 and Facebook… so this isn’t terrorist content, but they took down seven million posts pushing Covid-19 misinformation between April and June 2020 and, so they took down seven million; they put warning notes on 98 million Covid-19 misinformation posts in that period.  So all these companies are now doing transparency reports which you will find on the GIFCT website. I didn’t go and read all of them but another one that I read, Facebook deleted a record number of hate speech posts with 9.6 million taken down in the first quarter of 2020. That was compared to 5.7 million in the period prior and it marks a six-fold increase in hateful content removals compared with the second half of 2017 which is when they started recording these things.  And the reason why there’s so much more take-down isn’t necessarily because there’s more hateful content but because they’ve developed the tools, so the machine learning tools and AI. Twitter, between July and December 2020 actioned 1.27 million different accounts and when they talk about ‘action’, it’s either dealing with a post or an account and when you look at posts, Twitter is like 6,000 tweets a second, 500 million tweets a day. So in terms of that, it’s not a huge amount of content but it can have significant impact.  So for example if it’s President Trump or if its some other world leader that is putting out misinformation or hateful content - and we know that it was hateful content because Facebook and Twitter have taken his account down for incitement - so there is the number thing but then there’s the impact thing, of who is speaking, how many followers they have, what reach, how much it’s quoted in news media and other platforms and content and websites. |
| Lianne | I don’t think there’s anything I can add to the discussion because I’m obviously not an expert but I can say that there have been many, many articles written, conferences devoted to, books written about the definitions that apply in these cases and there isn’t a clear-cut view. But I think that Anjum’s last point is probably the one that is the most significant for this discussion is that it is about impact and there’s a subtlety that you see on the internet too because some of the language which has its genesis in the dark web, will find its way into seemingly innocent posts and then targeted advertising to draw people into those conversations that are about radicalisation and bringing people to that frame. So it is a combination, it is the intent and the impact that have to be combined. |
| Anjum | An added complexity to this is that the bad faith actors are getting very good at using language that can’t be detected by AI. So for example in the disinformation and anti-bad…you know, Covid disinformation space, to prevent take-down of pages they are now talking about dance parties and they’re talking about doctors who don’t dance or whether they do dance in relation to their views on vaccinations and so on. In an Indian context you’ll find, say on a Twitter bio, that someone will put the words ‘cauliflower farmer’. No AI is going to detect that but it refers to is a massacre of Muslims in a certain part of India and then they buried a lot of bodies and they planted cauliflower above them to hide that fact and so now, you know, that term is actually a loaded term related to mass murder but no AI is going to pick that. And if you’re not in the know, if you’re not Indian, if you don’t know that history, you’re not going to pick it up - but the kind of extremists that they want to bring on board, the kind of vulnerable people they want to bring to their cause, they’re going to know what that means and so that makes this whole area just so much more difficult, so much more complex. |
| Jordan | The Christchurch Call is this kind of content that we’ve explained how difficult it is to define but the problem of the kind of extremism is bigger than terrorist and violent extremist content because you’ve got to look at the journey people go on. So there might be stuff that doesn’t meet that threshold but it’s creating the conditions for that threshold to happen, either in action or in the digital space.  One of the things that came out of the hui in Christchurch in June, I think was a much clearer understanding, at least for me, maybe everyone else was there already, was that the system with the interaction of this Christchurch Call-type terrorist and violent extremist content and the precursors and pathways that people get radicalised through or start creating the conditions where people will act, is part of the problem as well. And that’s where you start to run into difficulty about if you eliminate this content by itself, that’s definitely than not eliminating it but is it a bit of an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff type approach. |
| Lianne | Well I think that’s why I was of the view that the hui would have benefited from a panel that included local government and the local Muslim community that would have quite a perspective on that to bring to the table. |
| Anjum | Agree. |
| Lianne | Just saying. |
| Jordan | That’s what Anjum, I think it was Anjum said before, right, that when you focus right down on the worst content, it’s easy to get agreement that it’s the worst and it’s beyond the pale and should be taken down and then when you start talking about the complex reality within which that content sits, of course it’s much harder to maintain that kind of consensus between countries, between countries and companies, and civil society actors who are looking to both of those to act responsibly and appropriately. |
| Sally | I don’t want to get too much into it but it might be difficult because it is a massive question, but how this sort of conversation sits within bigger conversations about free speech and the idea of the individual having the right to say what they like. Jordan, you touched before on the fact that New Zealand has hate speech legislation and that’s obviously being changed at the moment as well, but any kind of relatively quick points you’ve got around what’s happening here. |
| Jordan | The basic point is that there are no free speech rights in regard to violent extremist or terrorist content. The material is always… like in the New Zealand context, the manifesto of the Christchurch person and the video were deemed objectional content. People do not have unlimited rights to freedom of expression of anything and speech which supresses the rights of communities to express themselves is also problematic. So I’ll just say that along with the sort of developing incitement consultation that the Justice Ministry is doing at the moment about what you might call hate speech laws. Those are some of the things that are going on here but again, this is on the edges of my expertise. |
| Anjum | Just on the 20th of July, the Global Internet Forum released a report done by an independent organisation around the human rights impacts of the work that they do and I would really recommend that as a good read to understanding some of these issues. But there’s a few comments I want to make here. The first comment is that freedom of expression is not the only human right. When we think about human rights that are impacted, there’s the right to life, the right to safety, the right to privacy, freedom from discrimination, freedom to practice religious beliefs or to not have a religious belief, freedom of association. All of these rights are impacted by words and what is said and we know that’s where every expression is causing harm, there needs to be limited because we already do that in so many ways.  So we had defamation law for harm to individuals through slander and libel, we had the Films, Videos & Publications Classification Act which is the act that gives ratings to movies and programmes and also determines what material is objectionable. Objectionable material has up to 14 years in jail. We have the Broadcasting Act that sets standards for all broadcasters. We have the Harmful Digital Communications Act which again deals with individuals being bullied online.  And then outside of the law, we have things like Media Council Standards which relate to print media, we have advertising standards and then of course the private companies, the platforms that have their own community standards. So there’s already an accepted level of restriction on free speech often in these conversations, the way that free speech is brought forward there’s such a lack of recognition 1) of all the other rights and secondly, of all the current limitations.  When we think about the current laws, so we have two sections in the Human Rights Act which is the Civil Provision and a Criminal Provision around incitement to racial disharmony. So the Civil Provision, you can make a complaint to the Human Rights Commission, they’ll do a mediation, you can go through the Human Rights Review Tribunal and then go through the courts to get a fine basically or some action.  And the Criminal Provision is where somebody’s speech has actually caused someone else to cause harm and for that you could get a fine or go to jail. Both of those provisions only relate to race, colour, ethnicity and national origin. So, if someone was to get up and say all women should be raped, they don’t deserve anything better – that’s not a protected category, right, that is not a protected category. You can make threats to kill all women, you can make threats to rape women, it’s not covered.  Similarly - and I have examples which I showed in my speech at the Counter Terrorism Conference - where people were talking about burning down a mosque, a particular mosque they’re talking about, let’s burn it down, let’s christen it with pig’s blood, you know. Related commentary like that does not come under those provisions because it is not race, ethnicity, nationality or colour. That is the problem here that really extreme speech that is inciting harm on groups of people is currently not dealt with under the law.  The question then becomes which groups do you put in. But basically the categories that are in the Harmful Digital Communications Act, are probably the best categories to go with and that means not having political opinion. So Section 21 of the Human Rights Act goes through all the different categories of people that you can discriminate against and that list I think is too long and political opinion, generally if your political opinion is that all gays should be slaughtered and that it should be a crime, that would come under Rainbow category and it doesn’t need to come under political opinion.  So if you go with the protected categories as they are in the Harmful Digital Communications Act, it will cover political opinion that seeks to harm particular groups and I think those changes are needed. I think where the debate sits is what the actual wording of the Act should be. So the proposals talk about normalising hatred, something about inciting discrimination… I’m not sure if that’s the exact wording and I think that’s where we need to think carefully about what is the wording that we want in those acts but I absolutely agree that we need to broaden it beyond race, colour, ethnicity and national origin. |
| Lianne | I think Anjum’s just summed it up brilliantly. The phrase that I just add, as the Mayor of Ōtautahi Christchurch, is we know where it ends, this is where it ends and that’s the essence of the why and I think what Anjum has said is quite neatly explained the framework, it is not a freedom to say whatever you like whenever you like about whatever you like. It is within the bounds of responsibility that comes with any right. I really can’t add any more, thank you Anjum, that was brilliant. |
| Sally | Any final points you want to share. |
| Anjum | You can’t eliminate violent extremist content online, there’s always going to be some there and it’s how we minimise the impact of it, how can we de-platform it, how can we make sure that it doesn’t have the reach that will cause harm. But also that removing content is not the only answer to this and it’s an answer to a very small part of the problem and you need to have offline measures and the stuff that Lianne has been talking about around the Christchurch Invitation - allowing communities that are targeted to speak back, giving opportunities for diverse voices to be heard, dialogue that seeks to improve understanding, education, connection and removal of social isolation because social isolation is one of the biggest factors here. That you know, when we talk about resilience, the kind of people that are picked off into extremist activities and harmful activities and violence, are people that are isolated within their own community, that are feeling vulnerable, that are feeling unloved, that are feeling unvalued and they are not having daily interactions with people. Literally they’re just not interacting with people at all other than online and other than whoever lives in their own house.  So we need to think about all of those issues and so to think that just what we do around removing content online will solve the problem in any way - no, it won’t. We do need to do it - I wouldn’t say that we don’t do it at all - but we need to make sure that we’re doing all of those other things as well. |
| Jordan | Just a couple of thoughts, I agree with everything that Anjum has said. Two other things, there’s a key problem here with the way that the social media platforms, the biggest ones, amplify content and so getting a better understanding about the paths to radicalisation and the way that when content like this is there, it ends up being matched up to the people who might be vulnerable to it is a key research topic that needs better info sharing from the platforms and better research done, funded and done so we get a better understanding of that and how to shape those algorithms so they don’t have that impact.  Because it’s the essence of these bigger firms that they’re try to sell attention and so they become expert at providing content to you that they think you’ll want to look at and you get onto a path there. That’s one point. Then the other one is that it is one of those wicked problems and the only way to talk it through is to talk it through as Anjum just said. There is no silver bullet to getting rid of this content and it has to happen in that broader context of social inclusion and respect for diversity that is the kind of essence of a modern society. |
| Lianne | I think just my final point is that local government really does want to feature in this conversation a lot more up front and centre. We went to the hui because we know the significance of the role we can play both in terms of resourcing capacity building at the grassroots and enabling these community-led resilience initiatives that we’ve spoken of and I think that helps to bring together those basic building blocks for a resilient and inclusive society. And I know that that sort of sounds like it’s a little bit distant from the Christchurch Call but it’s the Christchurch Call coupled with the Christchurch Invitation which is the result that we’re looking to achieve and I really do like the idea that out of even just this conversation, that we’ve had an opportunity to think about how we might engage cities in the Christchurch Call. |
| Sally | As Anjum mentioned, it’s all about dialogue, isn’t it. |
| Lianne | Dialogue is mutual exchange and that is a respectful exchange of ideas. |
| Sally | Well I’d like to say tēnā koutou, thank you so much all of you for giving up some of your very precious, very busy time. We’ve only really scratched the surface, this is such a massive topic, I’m sure we could have dialogued, debated, discussed it for many, many hours. But thank you very much and maybe this is just the beginning and we’ll do another show on this down the line. Tēnā koutou. |
| Jordan | Kia ora. |