



5 November 2022

Open letter from Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to Mr. Elon Musk, Chief Executive Officer at Twitter

Dear Mr. Musk,

Twitter is part of a global revolution that has transformed how we communicate. I value Twitter for what I have learned and been able to share with people all around the world, easily and effectively. But I write with concern and apprehension about our digital public square and Twitter's role in it.

As the new owner of Twitter, you have enormous responsibilities given the platform's influential role as a digital space where people discuss their ideas, their worries and their lives. Twitter should be a place that is safe, and where people's rights are respected. Like all companies, Twitter needs to understand the harms associated with its platform and take steps to address them. Respect for our shared human rights should set the guardrails for the platform's use and evolution. In short, I urge you to ensure human rights are central to the management of Twitter under your leadership. Reports that Twitter's entire human rights team and all but two of its ethical AI team have been fired this week are not, from my perspective, an encouraging start.

I wish to share with you and your new team some fundamental principles from a human rights perspective that I would urge be front and center as you go forward.

1. Protect free speech across the globe.

In many contexts, Twitter, alongside other social media companies, is being pressed by governments globally to take steps that undermine free speech, whether by taking down content that is entirely legitimate under international standards, or using upload filters. We urge Twitter to respond to such demands by standing up for the rights to privacy and free expression to the full extent possible under relevant laws, and by transparently, promptly and regularly reporting on government requests – or pressures – that infringe those rights.

2. Free speech is not a free pass.

Conversely, viral spread of harmful disinformation, such as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to vaccines, results in real world harms. Twitter has a responsibility to avoid amplifying content that results in harms to people's rights.

3. There is no place for hatred that incites discrimination, hostility or violence on Twitter.

Human rights law is clear – freedom of expression stops at hatred that incites discrimination, hostility or violence. We know from our own investigations that hate speech has spread like wildfire on social media platforms in countries with starkly different cultural, political and religious contexts — with horrific, life-threatening consequences for thousands of people. Twitter's content moderation policies should continue to bar such hatred on the platform, and every effort needs to be made to remove such content promptly.



4. Transparency is key.

Research is essential to understand better the impact of social media on our societies. We urge you to maintain access to Twitter's data through its open APIs [application programming interfaces].

5. Protect privacy.

Free speech depends on effective protection of privacy. It is vital that Twitter refrain from invasive user tracking and amassing related data and that it resist, to the fullest extent possible under applicable laws, unjustified requests from governments for user data. I also urge Twitter to transparently inform users and the public about the steps it takes.

6. Languages and contextual expertise are not optional.

Twitter's responsibilities to maintain a rights-respecting and safe platform apply not just to English language content, or in the United States of America, but globally. Twitter should have sufficient content moderation capacity in all the languages and contexts in which it does business.

Twitter's responsibilities to respect human rights, and to address the adverse human rights impacts relating to its operations, are set out in more detail in the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), and through my Office's [B-Tech project](#) that works to apply those principles in practice within the technology sector. Twitter has been an active participant in the Community of Practice within that project, which we hope will continue.

Twitter has much to offer to our common agenda for a better world, but we need to be clear-eyed as to what is required to make that reality. In a world as complex as ours has become, our shared human rights offer a unifying way forward. We look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'V. Türk'.

Volker Türk