

Letter to Meta Shareholders: Vote YES to Uphold Meta's Human Rights Commitments

31.05.2023



Meta has failed in its human rights obligations and duty to shareholders to make full and accurate disclosures regarding existing and potential harms to human rights in India. Despite consistent engagement with Meta's Human Rights Impact Assessment process by civil society and human rights advocates, and repeated demands for accountability and release of the report, Meta has failed to make this crucial disclosure. A shareholder proposal filed against Meta seeks accountability from the large tech company and should raise the alarm for responsible shareholders on such an obvious deviation from the company's transparency when compared with their previous HRIA disclosures. **The undersigned human rights organizations, therefore, urge Meta shareholders to use their vote at the upcoming Annual General Meetings on May 31, 2023, to ensure that the company uphold its own public human rights commitments, basic human rights principles and disclose the findings around serious human rights concerns in its business operations in India.**

In India, hate speech and disinformation on Meta's platforms have long contributed to physical violence. In 2020, a Wall Street Journal investigation found a "pattern of favoritism" toward India's ruling party within Meta, including inaction against incitement

of hate speech. Sophie Zhang, an earlier Meta whistleblower revealed the partiality of takedowns of coordinated inauthentic behavior, favoring the political party in power. While in 2022, an analysis of political ads revealed that Meta was allowing surrogate advertising giving an alleged unfair advantage to the ruling party. Meta has a longstanding pattern of avoiding transparency and accountability in India to its users, public institutions and its shareholders, having failed to adequately respond to inquiries by the Delhi NCT legislature in the public domain, by either refusing to appear before legislative assembly panels or refraining from providing clear answers.

In July 2022, Meta released its first-ever human rights report, which included a meager four pages on Facebook's impact on India, and lacked any detailed substantive information. The summary disclosure failed to include the findings or recommendations from the independent investigation commissioned by law firm Foley Hoag LLP. Civil society, including stakeholders who participated in the independent investigation, believe that Meta is evading responsibility in India, and perpetuating human rights harms. Meta's failures to provide even the basic disclosures to determine sufficient action in the company's risk identification and mitigation presents a crisis that diminishes Meta's reputation, operations, human rights commitments, and, ultimately, shareholder investments, as shareholder value is likely to be negatively impacted when further human rights harms occur in India due to Meta's lack of transparency.

Ekō has submitted a shareholder proposal asking Meta to commission a non-partisan assessment of allegations of political entanglement and content management biases in its operations in India, including by providing evidence relevant to biases, exposures, and impact disclosed in the previously commissioned India HRIA.

Meta is advising shareholders to vote AGAINST the proposal, stating their justification for such limited and insufficient disclosure as necessary to mitigate security risks for Meta's employees. However a thorough read of the same principles cited for support by Meta are contrary to the United Nations Guiding Principles as interpreted by the Danish Institute for Human Rights Guidance on HRIA, which expressly states, "ideally, such alternatives (as limited HRIA disclosures) should be interim measures while companies work towards full disclosure of HRIA processes and findings." Furthermore, the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights are very explicit in requiring that "formal reporting by enterprises is expected where risks of severe human rights impacts exist, whether this is due to the nature of the business operations or operating contexts." Until Meta releases the findings of the full HRIA and creates effective and credible avenues for engagement with impacted civil society, there will be a need to further push the company for transparency and accountability in India – the company's largest market.

We therefore support the goals of the Ekō resolution and urge shareholders to vote yes on proposal 7 to ensure the company commits to urgent and necessary human rights due diligence, including a critical component of the UNGP aligned process - transparency.

List of Signatories:

Access Now

Accountability Counsel

Avaaz

Coalition For Women In Journalism

Defend Democracy

Digital Action

Ekō Fair Vote UK

Friends of India, Texas

Global Witness

Greek Helsinki Monitor

Heartland Initiative

Hindus for Human Rights

India Labour Solidarity

Internet Freedom Foundation

Justice For All, Chicago IL

'NEVER AGAIN' Association

OVC Alberta

Real Facebook Oversight Board

Red Dot Foundation Global

#ShePersisted

Stichting The London Story

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