

Cambodian prime minister

(2023-003-FB-MR)

March 16, 2023

User appeal to remove content from Facebook, and case referred by Meta

Submit public comments [here](#).

To read the case summary below in Khmer, please click [here](#).

*On January 8, 2023, seven months before Cambodia's next general election, a live video was streamed on the official Facebook page of Cambodia's prime minister, Hun Sen. Hun Sen has been in power since 1985 and is seeking re-election. The video shows a lengthy speech delivered by the prime minister in Khmer, Cambodia's official language, during a ceremony marking the opening of a national road expansion project in Kampong Cham. In it, he responds to allegations that his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) stole votes during the country's local elections in 2022. He asks his political opponents who made the allegations to choose between the "legal system" and "a bat," and says they can choose the legal system, or he "will gather CPP people to protest and beat you up." He adds, "if you say that's freedom of expression, I will also express my freedom by sending people to your place and home." He names individuals, warning that they "need to behave," and says he may "arrest a traitor with sufficient evidence at midnight." However, he says "we don't incite people and encourage people to use force." After the live broadcast, the video was automatically uploaded onto Hun Sen's Facebook page, where it has been viewed about 600,000 times and was shared fewer than 3,000 times. The speech was covered by local and regional media outlets. In recent years Cambodia has seen increasing crackdowns on political opponents, activists, trade union leaders and critical media outlets.*

*Three users reported the video five times for violating Meta's Violence and Incitement Community Standard. This prohibits "[t]hreats that lead to serious injury (mid-severity violence)," including "[s]tatements of intent to commit violence." Generally, content is prioritized for human review based on its severity, virality and likelihood of violating content policies. In this case, Meta's technology automatically closed out these user reports without human review, as they were deprioritized and not reviewed within 48 hours of reporting. After the users who reported the content appealed, it was reviewed by two human reviewers, who found it did not violate Meta's policies. At the same time, the content was escalated to policy and subject matter experts within Meta. They determined that it violated the Violence and Incitement Community Standard but applied a newsworthiness allowance*

*to allow it to remain on the platform. A newsworthiness allowance allows otherwise violating content to remain on Meta's platforms where its public interest value outweighs the risk of it causing harm.*

*One of the users who reported the content appealed Meta's decision to the Board. Separately, Meta referred the case to the Board saying that it involves a difficult balance between the values of "Safety" and Voice" in determining when to allow potentially violent speech from a political leader. Meta asked the Board for guidance on how to apply the Violence and Incitement Community Standard to threatening statements made by political leaders outside of conflict or crisis situations.*

*The Board selected this case because it raises relevant policy questions around how the company should treat speech from political leaders which appears to violate Meta's content policies. This is particularly relevant in the context of potentially violent threats against political opponents from a national leader before an election in a country with a history of electoral violence and irregularity. This case falls within the Board's "Government use of Meta's platforms" priority area and is also relevant to its "Elections and civic space" priority.*

*The Board would appreciate public comments that address:*

- *The political and human rights situation in Cambodia and the potential impact of Hun Sen's speech on the elections scheduled for July 2023.*
- *Meta's moderation of content posted by state actors, particularly moderating content they post about opposition figures, and its implications.*
- *Meta's responsibilities in elections and key moments for political participation, particularly in states like Cambodia where Meta's platforms are of greater importance to civic life and local media is restricted.*
- *What the criteria should be for deciding when to apply a "newsworthiness allowance" to potentially harmful content posted by political leaders.*

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