

## Islamophobia on the Internet: The growth of online hate targeting Muslims



### **Executive Summary**

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In this report the Online Hate Prevention Institute examines the problem of religious vilification against Muslims and the Muslim community. The report focuses on content on the Facebook social networking site. More specifically, we examine anti-Muslim hate that occurs publicly on Facebook pages which are to some degree dedicated to this purpose.

The presence of such Facebook pages, particularly those whose sole purpose is to promote hate speech against a religious group in violation of Facebook's terms of service, is deeply concerning. Theological debate and criticism of religion should be protected under freedom of expression principles, however, the vilification of a group of people on the basis of their religious belief or practise, or of individuals on the basis of membership of such a group, is a fundamental affront to human dignity.

This report documents 50 Facebook pages which contain examples of vilifying speech. A further two examples that do not contain vilifying speech but whose purpose is anti-Muslim are also included. From these pages we document 349 instances of hate speech. Given some content reoccurs in multiple places, these instances represent 191 different examples of hate speech. We have divided these examples into seven categories:

- Category A, Muslims as a Security Threat or Threat to Public Safety, 42 examples
- Category B, Muslims as a Cultural Threat, 29 examples
- Category C, Muslims as an Economic Threat, 11 examples
- Category D, Content Dehumanising or Demonizing Muslims, 37 examples
- Category E, Threats of Violence, Genocide and Direct Hate Targeting Muslims, 24 examples

- Category F, Hate Targeting Refugees / Asylum Seekers, 12 examples
- Category G, Other Forms of Hate, 36 examples

This report aims to highlight the existence of what is a serious hate speech problem on Facebook. To the extent that this content gives a window into the hate speech against Muslims that is currently circulating in society, we hope this report assists community leaders, policy makers, law makers and researchers in better understanding and responding to this threat to an inclusive and multicultural society. In democracies inclusiveness is regarded as a public good, as such, this hate speech is not only an attack on the Muslim community but an attack on society as a whole. As a society we must work together to tackle this problem.

This report is also directed to Facebook. We hope this report will allow the specific pages listed to be reviewed and appropriately closed. We hope the examples provided allow for a meaningful discussion about anti-Muslim hate speech within Facebook and result in better guidelines and training for those staff who first review complaints. We hope the technical recommendations allow Facebook to improve their response and their systems to prevent more hate speech spreading and to better respond to it in the future.

The Muslim community is by no means the only community targeted by hate speech on Facebook. Past reports by the Online Hate Prevention Institute have examined attacks on Indigenous Australians,<sup>1</sup> the Jewish Community,<sup>2</sup> Military Veterans,<sup>3</sup> and others. Our briefings have covered content related to Holocaust denial,<sup>4</sup> homophobia,<sup>5</sup> misogyny,<sup>6</sup> and attacks on individuals. While a wide range of groups are target, that doesn't in any way reduce the impact on each community, or on each individual, when they become a target. More needs to be done not only to remove the hate this report exposes, but to improve the systems at Facebook, and in society more generally, to prevent this hate spreading.

(For more about this report, please see: <http://ohpi.org.au/islamophobia-on-the-internet-the-growth-of-online-hate-targeting-muslims/>)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ohpi.org.au/aboriginal-memes-and-online-hate/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ohpi.org.au/recognizing-hate-speech-antisemitism-on-facebook/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ohpi.org.au/attacking-the-anzacs-on-facebook/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://ohpi.org.au/holocaust-denial-on-facebook-an-untold-story/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://ohpi.org.au/twitter%E2%80%AC-to-be-sued-over-gaysmustdie/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://ohpi.org.au/ohpi-video-women/>