

Facebook's India policy chief should step down, say civil rights groups

A coalition of civil rights groups are calling for Ankhi Das, Facebook's public policy chief in India, to step down in the face of growing sectarian conflict in India. The 41 groups sent an open letter expressing their objections to Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday, citing an escalating potential for Facebook-fueled violence in the country.

"Facebook should not be complicit in more offline violence, much less another genocide, but the pattern of inaction displayed by the company is reckless to the point of complicity," the groups write. "[We] write to urge you to take decisive action to address Facebook India's bias and failure to address dangerous content in India."

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Signatories include Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, Witness, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, which partners with Facebook to flag hate group accounts.

In the letter, the groups cite a range of violent acts linked to Facebook, from genocide in Myanmar to the recent shooting in Kenosha, Wisconsin, which set a troubling precedent for the growing anti-Muslim sentiment in India. To break that pattern, the groups demand the immediate removal of Ankhi Das, Facebook's embattled public policy chief for India. The groups also ask for the immediate engagement of local human rights organizations and for the ongoing civil rights audit to be removed from the company's India office and conducted

independently from Facebook's headquarters in California.

A longtime policy figure with ties to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Ankhi Das' role at Facebook has become a sore point for many civil society groups. In August, Das filed a criminal complaint against a local journalist after a *Wall Street Journal* report. The criminal complaint was flagged by the Committee to Protect Journalists as a potential threat to press freedom.

Das' position is particularly concerning given the escalation of sectarian religious conflicts in India, which the signatories say "show the potential for genocide." The letter references the North East Delhi Pogrom, in which a violent mob of Hindu nationalists left more than 40 dead. Facebook has been slow to label many Hindu nationalist pages as hate groups, for fear of offending Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"It's high time Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook take anti-Muslim hatred seriously and change how its policies are applied in Asia and across the world," said Heidi Beirich of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism in a statement. "Anti-Muslim materials are metastasizing across the platform as Facebook's own civil right audit proved. Facebook must put an end to this now."

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