

Google denies monitoring accord with Israeli government

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Israeli policemen search for a Palestinian man suspected of stabbing and wounding a woman in a neighborhood in the centre of Jerusalem on November 29, 2015

Internet giant Google on Monday denied a report from Israel's foreign ministry that it has reached an agreement with the government to jointly monitor YouTube videos inciting attacks.

The ministry last week said that Google, which owns YouTube, had agreed a joint mechanism to monitor online materials—including videos encouraging attacks on Israelis—after a meeting between Google executives and the Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely.

But the firm said no such agreement had been struck.

A Google spokesman told AFP the meeting, in which Hotovely met Google's senior counsel for public policy, Juniper Downs, and YouTube chief executive Susan Wojcicki, was just "one of many that we have with policymakers from different countries to explain our policies on controversial content, flagging and removals".

"The Israeli ministry for foreign affairs has corrected its original announcement which, in error, suggested there had been an agreement with Google to establish a mechanism to monitor online materials," he added.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Emmanuel Nahshon confirmed a statement on their website had been changed but said Israel was still "extremely grateful for the good relations with Google".

"Our common objective is to remove dangerous incitement to violence on social media. We have full confidence in the Google teams dealing with this removal."

'Online incitement'

Israel has been hit by a wave of stabbing, shooting and car ramming attacks carried out by Palestinians since October 1, with 17 Israelis killed.

As many as 101 Palestinians, including an Arab Israeli, have also died,

over half of them alleged attackers.

The Israeli government has repeatedly pointed to online incitement as a cause for the attacks, with videos and posts lionising the assailants being widely shared.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called on Google, Facebook and Twitter to do more to monitor and remove such material.

The Internet firms have defended their policies, saying they have sufficient protection against online incitement and rejecting perceptions of political interference.

"We rely on the YouTube Community to flag videos that they think violate our Community Guidelines," the spokesperson for Google said.

"Video flagged on YouTube is reviewed 24 hours a day and, if material violates our policies, it is removed quickly."

The foreign ministry has also announced a new office to monitor and flag inflammatory media online.

The body, which will begin operation early next year, seeks to highlight provocative materials in real time.

Last month, an Israeli NGO launched a lawsuit against Facebook over allegedly failing to remove pages that encouraged the killing of Jews.

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