

Facebook apologizes for removing 'napalm girl' photo

September 13 2016



This is a June 8, 1972 file photo of South Vietnamese forces follow after terrified children, including 9-year-old Kim Phuc, center, as they run down Route 1 near Trang Bang after an aerial napalm attack on suspected Viet Cong hiding places . Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg on Friday Sept. 9, 2016 challenged Facebook's restrictions on nude photos by posting an iconic 1972 image of a naked girl running from an aerial napalm attack in Vietnam. The Pulitzer Prize-winning image by Associated Press photographer Nick Ut is at the center of a heated debate about freedom of speech in Norway after Facebook deleted it from a Norwegian author's page last month. (AP Photo/Nick Ut, File)

Facebook's chief operating officer has apologized to Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg for deleting a photograph from its pages and conceded that "we don't always get it right."

Sheryl Sandberg said in a letter that Solberg had raised important issues about Facebook's decision last month to remove postings of an iconic 1972 image of a naked, screaming girl running from a napalm attack in Vietnam. The image, taken by Associated Press photographer Nick Ut, won a Pulitzer Prize.

On Friday, following protests in Norway and elsewhere, the tech giant reversed its decision and allowed the photo, known as "Terror of War," to be seen on its pages. Solberg, who said she'd never before had a Facebook post deleted, had reposted the image with a black box covering the girl from the thighs up and other iconic photos of historic events with black boxes covering the protagonists.

Sandberg said that Facebook had "global community standards" to adhere to but that it had learned from the mistake.

"Sometimes, though, the global and historical importance of a photo like "Terror of War" outweighs the importance of keeping nudity off Facebook," she said in a letter to Solberg dated Sept. 10. "After hearing from you and other members of our community, we have decided to restore the photo."



The cover to Norway's largest circulation newspaper, Aftenposten, displayed in Oslo Friday Sept. 9, 2016. Editor-in-chief and CEO, Espen Egil Hansen, wrote an open letter to founder and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, accusing him of threatening the freedom of speech and abusing power after deleting the iconic picture from the Vietnam war, taken by Associated Press photographer Nick Ut, of a young girl running from a napalm attack. The Pulitzer Prize-winning image by Nick Ut is at the center of a heated debate about freedom of speech in Norway after Facebook deleted it from a Norwegian author's page. (Cornelius Poppe, NTB scanpix via AP)

Like its Scandinavian neighbors, Norway takes pride in its freedom of speech. It's also a largely secular nation with relaxed attitudes about nudity.

Several members of the Norwegian government followed Solberg's lead and posted the photo on their Facebook pages. One of them, Education Minister Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, said it was "an iconic photo, part of our

history."

Sandberg described decisions facing Facebook as "difficult."

"We don't always get it right. Even with clear standards, screening millions of posts on a case-by-case basis every week is challenging," she said. "Nonetheless, we intend to do better ... Thank you for helping us get this right."

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