

Comment on Christchurch Call

16 May 2019 • by Don Christie

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Recently I wrote an Op Ed for the NZ Herald on the Christchurch Call (you can find it [here](#), but it’s behind the paywall).

In the Op Ed I wrote that the Christchurch Call and the meeting of heads of Government and technology companies was a good start, it was only a start.

The Prime Minister is correct to maintain momentum in this area. Governments and social media platforms have put effort into thwarting the radicalisation efforts of Islamic terrorism while at the same time ignoring the spectre in our own back yards of white supremacy and the rise of neo-Nazism.

What has emerged from the summit is a good first step.

Overall our mission should be to reclaim the Internet. When the Internet was built, when we all worked on this platform, it was supposed to be open and a general force for good. We were going to promote knowledge sharing, create connections and unite humanity.

And while we have definitely created connections, a lot of those connections have been to our detriment. We have let the Internet slip from being a force for good into being something used to



accountability whatsoever. These companies are driven by “return to shareholder value”, otherwise known as greed. We know Amazon puts online traders that use their platforms out of business if they compete with Amazon. We know Uber ignores safety and employment regulations. We know Facebook flouts media laws.

By letting these companies ignore laws and regulations with impunity we have given them free reign. While at the same time as individuals and nations we have rewarded them with our business. Not because we had to but because we were told that regulating multinationals in the digital space is impossible.

I argue this is a lie.

Multinational internet monopolies are terrified about one country setting an example and doing the “right thing”. They worry about the domino effect. They employ people in NZ and register businesses here that are just as liable as any other business for what happens in NZ or to New Zealanders.

If you think that “fake news” and fake social media accounts are bad I can assure you that we haven’t seen anything yet. A wave of automated misinformation designed to manipulate you and rip you off is about to hit. We now have the capability of generating fake content as though it came from trusted sources, your friends, your family, your colleagues and your leaders.

We need to think about our defence mechanisms. How to build societal and national resilience. Our government needs to have a strategy about how it uses Internet technologies and how to build safe positive spaces for Kiwis to enjoy the best that technology has to offer.

We have the means of production, we don't need to seize anything. Google, Facebook, and Amazon all used free and open source software to build their empires. New Zealand and New Zealanders can do the same. Build our own capabilities and systems that can interoperate with the rest of the world while at the same time offer some protection to our fellow Kiwis from the harms that are associated with this medium.

Our Government needs to take the lead, and our citizens need to understand and support this. It is not up to the Prime Minister alone to shoulder this burden. There needs to be several politicians and industry leaders to pick this up and run with it. We need to fight mass conglomeration with mass organisation.

While the Christchurch Call is a great start, it is just one piece of a puzzle that we can solve here in New Zealand and then show it to the world. The Internet is ours for the taking, so let's take it back.

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