

Musk lashes Australian order demanding X remove stabbing videos

April 23 2024, by Laura CHUNG, Steven TRASK



Elon Musk says X will appeal against an Australian injunction forcing it to take down videos of a church stabbing in Sydney.

Tech bad boy Elon Musk on Tuesday vowed to challenge demands that his social media platform X take down videos of a recent Sydney church

stabbing.

Australia's Federal Court on Monday gave the platform 24 hours to remove videos of an Assyrian bishop being slashed in the head during a recent attack.

Australia's eSafety Commission had sought the [court injunction](#) saying X ignored earlier removal notices.

Musk lashed out at the watchdog Tuesday, saying the content had already been removed for users in Australia.

"We have already censored the content in question for Australia, pending legal appeal, and it is stored only on servers in the U.S.."

As the deadline approached, the videos were not available to users in Australia, except for those using a VPN or other location-masking service.

Musk claimed Australia was trying to enforce a global ban.

"Our concern is that if ANY country is allowed to censor content for ALL countries, which is what the Australian 'eSafety Commissar' is demanding, then what is to stop any country from controlling the entire Internet," the billionaire posted on X.

'Absolutely disgusting'

The matter will return to court this week, where a judge will decide whether to extend the interim injunction.

A third hearing will follow where eSafety Commission lawyers will seek a permanent injunction and civil penalties against X, a spokesperson told

AFP.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese lashed out at Musk, who he described as an "arrogant billionaire" who "thinks he's above the law".

"The idea that someone would go to court for the right to put up [violent content](#) on a platform shows how out-of-touch Mr. Musk is," Albanese told public broadcaster ABC.

Tasmanian senator Jacqui Lambie called for Musk to be thrown in prison, saying he had "no conscience" and his behavior was "absolutely disgusting".

"Quite frankly the bloke should be jailed," she said.

'Toxicity and hate'

Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel was allegedly slashed in the head and chest by a 16-year-old suspect last week, sparking a riot by followers of the Assyrian Christian church in western Sydney.

Video of the bloody attack, which spread widely on [social media platforms](#), has been blamed by Australian authorities for feeding tensions in the community.

Australia has spearheaded efforts to hold the tech giants accountable for what their users post online, under its groundbreaking "Online Safety Act" passed in 2021.

eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant—a former Twitter employee—has been fighting a series of legal skirmishes with X, attempting to hold the platform accountable for violent and disturbing content.

She has raised concerns in the past about a spike in "toxicity and hate" on the platform following Musk's takeover.

A spokesperson for the commission said Tuesday it had also asked other companies, including Google, Snap and TikTok, to remove the footage—which they had done.

"While it may be difficult to eradicate damaging content from the internet entirely, particularly as users continue to repost it, eSafety requires platforms to do everything practical and reasonable to minimize the harm it may cause to Australians and the Australian community," the spokesperson said.

The watchdog recently slapped X with an Aus\$610,500 (US\$388,000) fine for failing to demonstrate how it is combating child sexual abuse content.

University of New South Wales law professor Rob Nicholls told AFP the church stabbing case would test new legal waters.

The eSafety Commission had issued take down orders in the past, and social media giants had always complied. "We haven't seen this before," he said.

"It is not as if Australia is unique in having a take down regime associated with content. Most social media businesses have built infrastructure to deal with a take down notice."

"Perhaps what we need to do is fine tune the law," Nicholls said.

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