

Facebook 'supreme court' for disputes ready in months

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Facebook said Tuesday its "supreme court," designed to be the final word in content removal disputes, should be in operation in a few months, as it named a British human rights activist to a key post.

The social network said that former Article 19 executive director Thomas Hughes would be the staff director of the oversight board, which is being developed to settle questions on what content is removed from Facebook or Instagram.

Hughes told reporters he sees the new post as "aligned to what I've been doing for the last couple of decades," on protecting human rights and freedom of expression.

The plan for an oversight board was proposed by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg in 2018, to make difficult calls on what is appropriate content for Facebook. The company initially planned to bring it into operation by the end of 2019.

The move is billed as part of an effort by Facebook to balance freedom of speech with concerns over

manipulation of the social network for abuse or deception, particularly heading into the US presidential election this year.

"Over time, I believe this body will play an important role in our overall governance," Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said in a post last year.

In September, Facebook finalized its "charter" for the new body. And on Tuesday, it unveiled its bylaws—subject to review when the board is in place—that set out the process for dealing with complaints and disputes.

The bylaws revealed on Tuesday allow people 15 days to petition the board regarding posts removed from Facebook or Instagram.

The board would make a decision within a maximum of 90 days.

Facebook executives said the time limits are guidelines and that the board would seek to weigh each case on the potential harm it may cause.

"Given the large number of content decisions Facebook makes, as well as the time it will take to hear cases, we expect the board will choose cases that have the greatest potential to guide Facebook's future decisions and policies," the California-based social network said.

The board will initially focus on disputes over removed content, expanding to address complaints regarding controversial posts allowed to remain on the platform, according to Facebook.

The board will have as many as 40 members hearing the appeals in a panel headed by three co-chairs.

Facebook will select the initial three co-chairs, and those positions will subsequently be selected by the board and trustees of the panel.

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