

**The Global Network Initiative Expresses Concern About the Freedom of Expression and Privacy Implications of Australia's "Sharing of Violent Abhorrent Material" Bill**

The multistakeholder members of the Global Network Initiative (GNI) share the outrage regarding the massacre in Christchurch, and express sympathy and solidarity with the victims, and with the entire nation of New Zealand. While this tragedy has rightly prompted reflection and calls for action to address violent extremism, GNI is concerned that the government of Australia's efforts to rush through the *Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Violent Abhorrent Material) Bill 2019* ("the Bill") could have significant negative impacts on freedom of expression and privacy for Internet users in Australia and beyond.

GNI respectfully calls on Australian lawmakers to undertake an urgent public review of the Bill, using the next parliamentary session to deliberate carefully and through normal procedures on the changes that were rushed through this week, including by inviting feedback from relevant experts from academia, civil society, industry, and the public. It is precisely because of the importance of this issue that lawmakers should work judiciously to ensure that their efforts result in necessary, proportionate, and ultimately effective action.

At a time when states around the world are considering various approaches to regulating Internet content, GNI is concerned that democratic governments such as Australia uphold and demonstrate their commitment to balanced rhetoric, careful deliberation, due process, and rule of law. In addition, GNI echoes the UN Special Rapporteurs on counter-terrorism and human rights, and freedom of opinion and expression, in [calling](#) on lawmakers to reflect carefully on Australia's international human rights law commitments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Specifically, GNI urges careful re-consideration of the definitions of "abhorrent violent material" and "abhorrent violent conduct." The definitions in the Bill could be subject to overly broad interpretation and lead to the blocking of content that is protected by international and domestic laws. In particular, lawmakers should consider how the Bill, notwithstanding the defences provided in section 474.37, may incentivize content and hosting providers to avoid publishing or

quickly remove content whose intent is to document, raise awareness of, or denounce human rights abuses, war crimes, and other criminal activity. Such “over removal” could have significant unintended consequences for citizen journalists, activists, human rights defenders, counter-violent extremism efforts, and national security.

### **About the Global Network Initiative**

*Launched in 2008, the Global Network Initiative ([www.globalnetworkinitiative.org](http://www.globalnetworkinitiative.org)) occupies a unique place in the global conversation about freedom of expression and privacy in the Information and Communications Technology Sector. The GNI’s multistakeholder approach works to bring together information and communications technology companies, civil society (including human rights and press freedom groups), academics and investors from around the world to protect and advance freedom of expression and privacy, facilitate shared learning and collaborative problem solving, and promote coordinated advocacy. For a list of our network members, click [here](#).*