



# PRACTICAL GUIDE TO REPORTING THREATS Against Human Rights Defenders on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads





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The Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) works to advance the enjoyment of human rights through the effective use of the Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS) and other international protection mechanisms.

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## Introduction

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**Human rights defenders play an essential role in every democracy:** they monitor state action, expose abuses of power, encourage civic participation, and protect historically excluded communities. Their work strengthens the rule of law by promoting transparency, demanding compliance with the law, and helping to safeguard institutional checks and balances

Because of this role of public oversight, defenders often become the target of attacks by both state and non-state actors who seek to discredit, intimidate, or prevent them from continuing their work. These attacks do not occur only in physical spaces: today, social media has become a key arena for information and solidarity campaigns, but also for hate speech, harassment, misinformation, and threats that can escalate into offline violence.

In this context, the tools provided by digital platforms become essential, alongside national and international human rights protection mechanisms. Facebook, Instagram, and Threads are spaces where public issues are debated, narratives are shaped, and communities organize. Reporting violent or threatening content helps to curb its circulation, document risk patterns, draw attention to attacks, and hold platforms accountable to their human rights obligations.

**This guide seeks to strengthen defenders' capacity to respond to online threats, explaining in practical terms how to report threats and other abuses on social media, as well as the avenues available when the initial tools are not sufficient.**



## Why is it important to report threats on social media?

Social media is a space where we share ideas, opinions, and causes. However, it can also be used to threaten, intimidate, and harass people who defend human rights.

A [human rights defender](#) is anyone who, individually or collectively, acts to promote, protect, or demand the rights of others. This includes journalists, social leaders, members of civil society organizations, environmental activists, feminists, trade unionists, justice operators, or anyone who speaks out against injustice.

Even when attacks occur online, their effects are real: they can generate fear, affect people's reputations, and, in many cases, be related to, exacerbate, or escalate to offline violence.

Reporting these posts not only helps stop the spread of violent content, but also:

→ **Reduces immediate risk**, because if the content is removed, it stops circulating.

→ **Documents the attack**, which can serve as evidence when seeking support from authorities or protection mechanisms.

→ **Raises awareness of the problem** and helps platforms recognize patterns of violence against defenders.

Meta, the company that owns Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, has internal policies to protect its users and prevent online violence. As part of its [Corporate Human Rights Policy](#), the company is committed to respecting human rights in line with the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#). It also recognizes the rights that are universally recognized in international instruments like the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), among others.

**Reporting is not only your right: it is also a way to continue defending human rights in the digital age.**

## What content on social media can be reported?

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Human rights defenders are often [the target of smear campaigns, harassment, and threats on social media](#). In many cases, these attacks seek to silence their work or instill fear. It is therefore important to know what type of content can be reported on platforms and how to do so safely.

Meta has a set of rules called [Community Standards](#), which apply in all countries and set limits on what can be posted on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads. These standards exist to protect the safety, privacy, and dignity of users. They are often modified or updated, so if you are considering reporting content, we recommend checking the Oversight Board website.

Within these standards, there are currently three policies that are particularly relevant to human rights defenders:

### 01. Violence and incitement >>>

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[Content that promotes or justifies violence](#), including direct or indirect threats (also called veiled threats), death wishes, or messages that could provoke offline aggression, is removed. This includes incitement to violence directed at a person or group of people based on their protected characteristics, as is the case with human rights defenders.

### 02. Bullying and harassment >>>

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[This policy protects people from harassment](#) or smear campaigns involving threats, doxxing (disclosure of personal data), sending threatening messages, and other acts of aggression. Enhanced protection is offered to those at high risk of harm offline, including human rights defenders.

### 03. Hate speech >>>

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[Attacks, insults, or mockery](#) directed at individuals or groups based on race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, disability, or other personal characteristics are prohibited. Meta also considers context of the country or situation: a post may be considered dangerous if shared in an environment where attacks against human rights defenders already exist.

These three policies are the main tools for reporting violent, discriminatory, or threatening content circulating on social media against defenders. If a post, comment, or image meets any of these characteristics, it can and should be reported.

## ▶▶ How to report content posted on Meta social media?

If a post on Facebook, Instagram, or Threads contains threats, harassment, or incitement to violence, it can be reported directly from the platform. The process is simple and can be done from a computer or mobile phone. No technical knowledge is required: anyone can do it by following these steps.

### Step-by-step guide for reporting a post:

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|  <b>1</b> | <b>Before reporting, save evidence:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Take screenshots of the content (including date, time, profile name, and link).</li><li>→ Save the original link, even if the content is later deleted.</li><li>→ This can serve as evidence if you need to report the situation to authorities or protection mechanisms.</li></ul> |
|  <b>2</b> | <b>Open the post</b> you want to report.  |
|  <b>3</b> | <b>Click on the options icon</b> (the three dots ... in the upper right corner).  |
|  <b>4</b> | Select <b>"Report post."</b>  |
|  <b>5</b> | <b>Choose the category that best describes the reason</b> (e.g., <i>violence, harassment, or hate speech</i> ).   |
|  <b>6</b> | Review the summary and <b>click "Submit."</b>   |

## Once the report has been submitted:

- ▶▶ Meta will review the content and determine whether it violates the Community Standards.
- ▶▶ If the content violates the policies, it will be removed.
- ▶▶ If it is not removed, the user who reported it can follow up on the case from the Help Center (in the Help and Technical Support section).

## Request a second review

If Meta decides to keep the content and you believe the post is still threatening or harassing, you can request a second internal review.

To do so:



- 01** Go to your Facebook, Instagram, or Threads profile.
- 02** Go to "Help and Technical Support"  
↓  
"Help Center"  
↓  
"Reports about other people."
- 03** Open the message with Meta's decision.
- 04** Click on "View options" and then on "**Request another review**" and follow the instructions on the screen.

## Meta will review the case again.



If it determines that the content does violate the standards, it will remove it. If not, it will inform you if there is a possibility of appealing the decision to **Meta's Oversight Board**.

## ▶ Appeal to the Oversight Board

If, after the second review, Meta decides to keep a post that you consider threatening or violent, you can still ask for it to be reviewed by an independent body called the [Oversight Board](#).

The Board reviews cases from Facebook, Instagram, and Threads when there is doubt about whether a post should remain online. Its role is to verify whether Meta's decision was correct and whether users' rights are being respected.

You can only appeal once you have received Meta's final response. If your case qualifies, Meta will include an identification number in its message that you will need to start the appeal process.

### To file an appeal, follow these steps:

-  **1** Go to [www.oversightboard.com](http://www.oversightboard.com) within 15 days of Meta's final decision.
-  **2** Log in with an active Facebook, Instagram, or Threads **account** and provide the identification number provided by Meta.
-  **3** The **Board's Case Selection Committee** will evaluate whether to accept your case.
-  **4** If the case is accepted, the **Board publishes an announcement** on its official website with a brief, anonymous description of the case.
  - At that point, a 14-day period opens for any interested person or organization to [submit public comments](#).
  - These comments, which are limited to a maximum of five pages, allow the Board to receive input from experts, advocates, organizations, and individuals with knowledge of the context, so that it has more comprehensive and diverse information before making its decision.
-  **5** Once the period has closed, a **panel of Board members analyzes the case, deliberates, and, by majority vote, makes a decision**.
  - The Board may uphold or reverse Meta's decision and order that the post be restored or removed.
  - In addition, it may recommend changes to Meta's policies when it considers that its rules or processes do not adequately protect human rights or prevent harm in risky contexts.

If the Board orders the content to be removed, Meta must do so within seven days. It must also review whether there are similar posts and take steps to prevent the same type of material from continuing to circulate.

This process is a valuable tool for defenders, as it allows an **independent and informed body** to analyze the case from a broader perspective, considering contextual information and international human rights standards. At CEJIL, it took about eight months for the Oversight Board to reach a decision on the content we reported.

## Recommendations for defenders

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### 01. Document everything

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Save screenshots, links, dates, and names of the accounts involved before reporting the content. This information can serve as evidence if you need support from your organization or if you decide to activate national or international protection mechanisms.

### 02. Report from the platform

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Use the reporting tools on Facebook, Instagram, or Threads. Although the content is not always removed on the first attempt, each report helps to make the attacks visible and leaves a record of the problem.

### 03. Follow up

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Check your Help Center inbox for Meta's response. If you are not satisfied with the decision, request a second review or file an appeal with the Content Advisory Board.



## 04. Act in coalition ▶▶▶

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If you decide to file a case or submit comments to the Oversight Board, seek support from other organizations, networks, or collectives. Asking other organizations to submit comments on your case can give it greater strength and visibility and provide valuable contextual information that helps the Board understand the risks faced by defenders.

## 05. Complement with other protection strategies ▶▶▶

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Reporting threats to platforms does not replace legal or advocacy actions that can strengthen your protection. Threats against defenders may constitute a crime or a human rights violation, so it is also important to activate national or international channels.

- To learn how to criminally investigate threats against defenders, review the [Esperanza Protocol](#) developed by CEJIL in collaboration with more than 600 experts, which offers practical tools for prosecutors, lawyers, and organizations.
- If you want to learn about strategies for dealing with the Inter-American Human Rights System, consult CEJIL's Guides for Human Rights Defenders, available in both a [general version](#) (Spanish only) and [a version adapted for young people \(Spanish only\)](#).



Following these steps does not fully eliminate the risks, but it strengthens your ability to respond and helps platforms assume their responsibility to protect those who defend human rights in the digital space.

## ▶▶ A success story

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In July 2024, a human rights defender in Peru, recognized for her work on human rights and freedom of expression, was threatened on social media. A member of an extremist group posted a manipulated image on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) showing her with blood on her face, accompanied by text questioning the work of human rights organizations in Peru.

The post was a veiled threat: it did not mention an explicit act of violence, but, in a context of attacks and smear campaigns against defenders in the country, it represented a real risk to her safety.

The [Center for Justice and International Law](#) (CEJIL), a regional organization that monitors cases of human rights violations in Latin America, reported the post to both platforms, requesting its removal.

On Facebook, Meta initially decided to keep the content, so CEJIL requested a second review. The case was referred to [Meta's Oversight Board](#), which received 65 public comments from various individuals and civil society organizations.

In May 2025, the Board issued its [decision](#). It concluded that the image constituted a “veiled threat” under the terms of the Violence and Incitement policy and ordered Meta to remove the post. It also recommended strengthening its risk assessment processes in contexts where defenders are targeted by harassment campaigns.

This case shows that Meta's reporting and appeal mechanisms can be effective, especially when digital threats are contextualized within an environment of real violence. It also underscored the importance of documenting attacks, using available tools, and acting collectively—through organizations, networks, and mechanisms—to demand protection for those who defend human rights in the digital space. You can read more about this case in the article [Online threats, real-world harms: Protecting human rights defenders](#), published in Open Global Rights.