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European Commission
Didier Reynders, Commissioner for Justice and Consumers
Rue de la Loi, 200
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Menlo Park, 26 March 2020

Re: Ares (2020)1942651s

Dear Commissioner Reynders,

Thank you for your letter of 23 March 2020 regarding various illegal and unfair practices being carried out by traders in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak.

Facebook shares your concerns and those of the CPC authorities that online platforms should remain a safe and secure environment for users. We work to remove harmful and illegal content, including of the type specifically outlined in the CPC Common Position. Whilst this is the case at all times, we appreciate that this is all the more important at present, given the tragic events unfolding around the world with regard to the outbreak of COVID-19.

As such, I am pleased to provide some further information below as to the measures Facebook is putting in place to address the issues raised in your letter.

Measures Facebook is taking to combat deceptive and exploitative conduct during the Coronavirus epidemic

Facebook already has robust policies in place that prohibit exploitative or deceptive advertisements and sales of healthcare products and services, and we regularly remove content that violates these policies.

However, in light of the current extraordinary situation, we have recently updated our guidance to our content reviewers on how to apply our policies to COVID-19-related content, and we have announced a number of additional steps that we have taken in response to the current situation[1]. These steps include the temporary prohibition of the sale of certain products across our platforms entirely, so as to better protect our users from inflated prices and predatory behavior.

In particular, we have banned both ads and commercial listings, such as those on Marketplace, for medical face masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and COVID-19 test kits. This is intended to stop illegitimate sellers, including price-gougers, from seeking to

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[1] https://about.fb.com/news/2020/03/coronavirus/

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exploit people's fear of COVID-19 to get them to pay higher prices, to stop promotion of products in deceptive or exploitative ways, and to remove content otherwise trying to exploit or capitalise on the current health crisis or contribute to public safety concerns by selling COVID-19-related products. We also prohibit people from making health or medical claims related to COVID-19 in product listings on commerce surfaces, including those listings that guarantee a product will prevent someone from contracting the virus. This ban applies across our services from advertising to organic content on Facebook, Marketplace and Instagram.

We are also putting in place additional measures to limit the spread of misinformation and false claims related to the COVID-19 and are removing as much of this content as we can. This includes claims related to false cures or prevention methods or claims that create confusion about health resources that are available. We will also block or restrict hashtags used to spread misinformation on Instagram.

We trust that this information is of assistance. To the extent that you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Monika Bickert
VP, Public Policy