



May 12, 2022

**Pavel Durov**

CEO and Co-Founder  
Telegram

Dear Mr. Durov,

Recognizing the role of Telegram in today's society (it has over 500 million users around the world and is the most popular messenger in Russian speaking segment of the Internet), as well as technology which giving to people more opportunities for exercising their human rights (including in cases of authoritarian governments' brutal crackdowns and censorship), at the same time we underline that Telegram, unfortunately, can be used for infringement of these rights.

We have already [referred](#) to Telegram in January, 2022 in connection with posting and disseminating by the Belarusian authorities and pro-State bloggers through the Telegram resources some video and text materials, violating human rights and contained radical forms of hate speech towards LGBTQ people ("confession videos", which is now a common practice of Belarusian law enforcement agencies and comments). We have not got a direct answer, but we could see the result - most of the materials from the annex to our previous letter have been removed. We appreciate such a reaction.

With regret we again would like to draw your attention to the facts of "confession videos". This time with participation of children. These videos are published on official channels of law enforcement agencies and distributed by state propaganda.<sup>1</sup>

We are stressing the degrading and traumatic nature of these practices. The victims in this case - children - are an extremely vulnerable group, which increases the negative effect of such "public executions". It can be seen from the video that the teenagers are clearly scared - most likely they were under psychological, and possibly physical pressure. Such a practice can leave a deep mark on the psycho-emotional state of the child. Moreover, the state propaganda, publishing such videos, uses extremely offensive language, labeling the

<sup>1</sup> <https://t.me/zheltyeslivy/8482>; <https://t.me/zheltyeslivy/25122>; <https://t.me/ontnews/19505>; <https://t.me/zheltyeslivy/38851>; <https://t.me/zheltyeslivy/9734>; <https://t.me/pressmvd/2055>

teenager as a criminal, which not only violates the presumption of innocence, but also casts doubt on the possibility of full-fledged development for him.

These practices, first of all, are a violation of the right of children to freedom from degrading treatment (Art. 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child), the right to privacy (Art. 16 of the Convention) and the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others (Art. 40 of the Convention).

In March 2022 Belarusian Helsinki Committee [has sent](#) this information to the UN Special Rapporteurs on torture, on freedom of expression and opinion, on the right to health, on the right to privacy and on the human rights situation in Belarus.

By Telegram [Terms of service](#), users cannot promote violence on publicly viewable Telegram channels, bots, etc. We consider that these videos, recorded under pressure, are acts of violence and their posting has to be prohibited. Forcing to disclose personal information in these videos as well as an act of violence.

We again respectfully remind you that on December, 8<sup>th</sup> of 2021 the group of NGOs together with one of the most authoritative NGOs in the sphere of human rights in the digital age – Access Now – addressed Telegram with a [letter](#) and underlined the necessity to mitigate human rights impacts in accordance with the [2011 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).

We respectfully remind as well that today's commonly recognized standards of conducting business in the context of respecting human rights are based on and contained with the 2011 UN Guiding Principles which says that business has an obligation of human rights due diligence, including assessment and preventing all possible human rights abuses linked to its operations, products, or services.

We would like to mention that [Apple](#) and [Google](#) through which resources Telegram can be downloaded by users have strong commitments to human rights compliance in their business operations.

We consider it is important to emphasize that we highly appreciate the importance of freedom of speech and freedom of expression, but these materials cannot be qualified as such because the only obvious purpose of their posting is the humiliation of the human dignity of representatives of one of the most vulnerable groups - children as well as instill a



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sense of fear in their peers, aiming to nip in the bud the children's attempts to exercise their rights (including rights to express an opinion).

Taking into account all the above-mentioned, we call on Telegram to prevent using the Telegram resources for human rights violations, in particular:

- To block access to the materials, mentioned in this letter;
- Totally block the channel <https://t.me/zheltyeslivy>, which produces the largest amount of human rights abusive, discriminatory content, systematically used by the State for licking data, promoting violence and personal data, and are main sources for reposting (taking into consideration information from our previous letter);
- To issue a warning to other named channels about non-admissibility of further posting and disseminating of such materials;
- Taking into account the fact that such practices in the Belarusian segment of Telegram from the State-affiliated channels are very common, and even blocking of some channels cannot be effective enough in some cases, because new ones of the same content can be immediately created – focus Telegram's attention on this area in respect to more thorough human rights due diligence, including more detailed assessing risks of human rights violations made via Telegram resources.

Sincerely,



Aleh HULAK,

Chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee



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