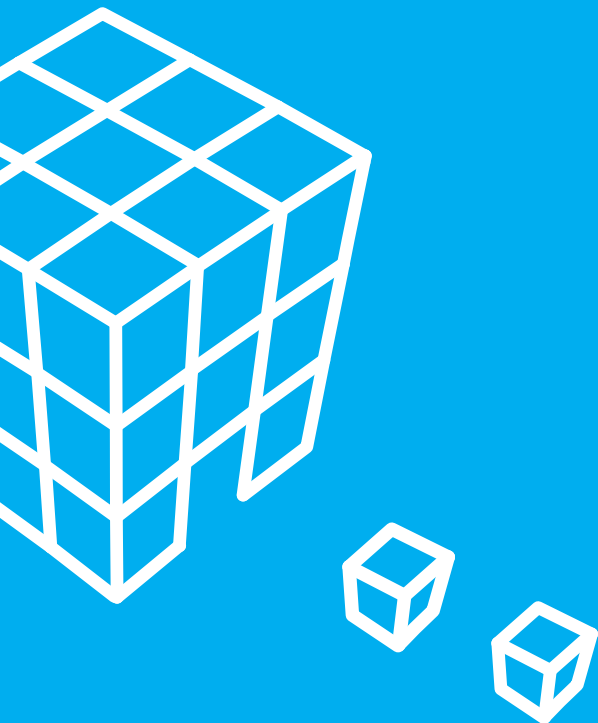


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Summary

WORKSHOPS

2018





Workshops 2018

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Bangladesh Workshop

Social media is heavily utilized by extremist groups to spread hate speech, extremist views, and threats against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), endangering the lives of Bangladeshi HRDs.

The first phase of the workshop focused on current challenges that Bangladeshi Human Rights Activists face, particularly in the social media sphere. We discussed incidents in which websites and profiles were hacked and shut down, or fake profiles led to real harassment. Present at the workshop were two prominent activists from Bangladesh, Rafida Bonya Ahmed and Imtiaz Shams, together with which we discussed instances in which activists were banned on Facebook after opponents mass-reported their activities. As the workshop group was composed of a significant number of experts from the tech field, conversations covered “verified profiles”, securing account data as well as other cyber security concerns expressed by activists. By the end of the first round, it had become clear that a collaboration is urgently needed to share relevant knowledge.

The participants launched into the second workshop with a brainstorming session, which ultimately produced not only a campaign idea, but also a timeline. The group agreed on the need for a database containing information on victims and their issues, before taking concrete steps to protect their privacy. The database would provide solid case-based evidence that can be used to advocate for Facebook, the primary platform about which concerns were expressed, to reform its guidelines. Eventually, the campaign was given the name #unban.me, and those participants interested in progressing the campaign shared their contact details to collaborate further.



Pakistan Workshop

In the interest of global growth strategies, social media companies appear to be sharing personal data and complying with abusive regimes, facilitating the capture and torture of dissident voices.

The Pakistan workshop looked at the role of social media companies and their complicity in human rights violations. Here we similarly established the need for evidence collection and proposed the building of a database of violations. Backed by sufficient reliable data the aim is to find legal assistance in the EU region, and to file legal cases against tech companies under GDPR provisions.

In the focus workshop, an open source monitoring tool displaying social media trends was proposed as a means to improve the safety of HRDs, and act as an early warning system against possible threats. It was further extrapolated that policy effects could also potentially be monitored, and data-mining these results could help find an effective approach to countering fake news. A demonstration of the fake-news detection software made by Klarrio and commissioned by Nato, illustrated the potential effectiveness of this idea and how such a tool could be developed, and work in practice.

As a long-term objective participants of the Pakistani group plan to promote a human rights based approach on tech platforms. Through evidence collection and legal avenues we hope to encourage social media companies to develop a protection fund for activists who suffer due to their activism on social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter or Google). This protection fund should be used for legal assistance, relocation and other support mechanisms for individual activists. It is our goal that this protection fund be set up and funded by the social media companies themselves.



Sudan Workshop

The Sudan workshop delved into the question: what could be done in order to help activists who want to connect in a very repressive environment and with little or no access to technology. Nobody knew at that moment, mere weeks after the workshop, a real people's revolution would start in Sudan. Yousif Fasher, activist from Darfur gave a brief introduction into the situation of the country: a president who is accused by the ICC of genocide in Darfur, three simultaneous civil wars, poverty and unemployment. He also explained in detail the hardships that activists face: harassments, violence, online and offline monitoring of activists, etcetera.

Although time was too short to get a complete picture of the situation, the group did brainstorm a few alternative solutions including: creating an online community of Sudanese that would act as a 'parallel nation' where freedom of expression, religious and ethnic tolerance, and democracy would be the norm.

Also more specifically it was discussed how mobile phones could be used in such a way that sensitive information could easily be hidden, or destroyed, in case a phone was confiscated by police or security services. All in all there was a good, and in-depth discussion despite no concrete leads towards a solution.



Rwanda Workshop

The Rwanda workshop was an interesting and fruitful coming together of people from the Rwandan diaspora community, Human Rights Defenders, tech professionals and members of The Hague Peace Projects. The goal of this workshop was to bring to light, and to find possible solutions to the human rights violations in Rwanda through the use of new and available technologies.

The first part of this workshop was designated to discussing the human rights issues taking place in Rwanda, and sketching a picture of the current economic, social and political situation. The main focus revolved around the question: is Rwanda really the positive example that is consistently presented by the Rwandan Government? Akayezu Muhumuza Valentin, Legal Practitioner and Human Rights Activist, explained that in order to understand the reality in Rwanda, one should look at the performance of social media. It appears that the government heavily restricts the freedom of speech on social media, and the narrative created and brought to the public is not in line with the actual situation in Rwanda. People who publicly express a political opinion against the government are at risk. We discovered that the currently available Timby application offers a possible solution to providing more security for HRDs in Rwanda.

The Timby application can be used as an alert system for activists, journalists and HRDs. As Rory Bowe, project manager of Timby explained, the application consists of a tracking option which can be activated by a person in danger. An encrypted SMS message and GPS location is then sent to a secure base in the country, allowing for an immediate response and rapid help to be provided.

As a result of this workshop, a good connection between Rwandan HRDs and tech professionals has been made. A follow-up is in the planning, in which HRDs and Tech experts from Rwanda and the Netherlands are invited to continue working on a long-term plan for Rwanda. The potential cooperation and relation with Timby is a positive outcome of this workshop, and we look forward to seeing it's results.



North Korea Workshop

The North Korean human rights issue is messy and complicated. The challenge for participants was to reflect on possible technological solutions to uncovering the scope and scale of institutional slavery of North Koreans outside of the country and where the money trail leads. Shannon Stewart, a researcher and data scientist at the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, was the designated human rights expert for the Focus and Discovery workshops. She explained to participants the shocking reality that North Korea forces some of its citizens to work abroad as slaves and send money back home. This kind of 'labour exportation' helps fund the North Korea state, and in particular, it's development of nuclear weapons.

Stewart outlined three key dimensions in addressing this human rights issue. First, unequivocally prove that North Korean slaves are embedded into the supply chain of over 72 countries. Second, give states and governments an incentive to transparentize the supply chains and labour forces of their countries. Third, increase public awareness of this human rights abuse to draw attention, protests and action which may apply additional pressure on countries to right their wrongs.

A first step to tackling this unlawful and inhumane slave trade is creating an encryption system that allows researchers and activists around the world to communicate safely. Although lots of ideas were bounced back and forth, these discussions did not lead to a possible break-through technology. However, some of the more interested participants did exchanged contact information at the end of the Focus workshop.



Potential Solutions

The output of the Pakistan workshop bore a strong resemblance to that of the Bangladesh workshop due to the overlapping nature of the social media driven human rights violations. It also transpires that the social media situation in Rwanda is plagued by similar problems. Combining their outputs gives us the following outline for potential solutions:

Technology: Find or create an open source platform which allows HRDs to track data and social media trends to provide an early warning system for HRDs in potential danger. This will allow HRDs to alert social media of harmful hashtags or trends that could endanger the lives of HRDs, and in turn decrease their visibility online to avoid further harmful trending.

Education: Inform and Educate HRDs about how to communicate safely online (best practices for social media use and communication amongst activists), and how they can effectively encrypt confidential information on their personal devices.

Research/Lobby: Research the scope and scale of extremist's data collection to threaten and silence HRDs. Construct a database containing case-based evidence and data from victims. This evidence can be used to lobby the international community and social media platforms (notably Facebook and Twitter) to establish a definitive moral code, and create definitions for hate speech and political expression that favour HRDs versus oppressive governments.



How can you help?

Become a patron of positive change!

The Hague Hacks strives to create a trans-disciplinary network to enrich the problem-solving process. We see the value of including multiple perspectives and expertise in the conversation. Become a part of our growing network of human rights defenders, researchers, tech experts, Startups, Scaleups, partners, sponsors, etc.

The Hague Hacks would not be possible without the commitment and passion of our partners and volunteers. For this, we are extremely grateful. We are always happy to see our team grow and should you be willing to share your time and talents with The Hague Hacks team, we will do our best to delegate tasks to compliment your unique skills.

Thank you!

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