

Speech: PM speech at UNGA: preventing terrorist use of the internet.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

And thank you very much for being here. This is the first time that world leaders and the tech industry have come together to speak at the United Nations. And I am particularly grateful to my co-hosts, President Macron of France and Prime Minister Gentiloni from Italy, for their leadership in this area, and also to Kent Walker from Google for representing the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism.

Now, the internet and social media can and should be forces for good. But they have also been co-opted by terrorists to incite acts of evil. The internet is one way groups like Al-Qaeda and Daesh recruit, radicalise and direct their supporters, and it is proving increasingly effective.

Recent attacks have demonstrated a new trend in the threat we all face, as home-grown perpetrators are radicalised online and inspired to attack their fellow citizens, often using the crudest means. Daesh publications available online contained instructions of how to use a motor vehicle to attack pedestrians. This was the methodology which was used in the attacks on Westminster Bridge, London Bridge, Finsbury Park, Nice, Barcelona, Berlin – the list goes on. Those killed and injured came from all corners of the globe. And just last week, we saw the London Underground targeted by terrorists using an explosive device. This is a global problem and all our populations are affected, whether at home or abroad. As a global community, we must do all we can to tackle it.

Now, the United Kingdom has provided leadership in the global effort to remove dangerous content from the internet and we've been joined by friends and allies, including France and Italy. But governments alone will not succeed. Internet companies also have a vital role to play, and I am pleased that they are stepping up their action in this area.

In June, Facebook, Microsoft, YouTube and Twitter jointly launched the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism at an event attended by our Home Secretary. These and other companies are already making progress in stopping the spread of terrorist content, which we warmly welcome.

The average lifetime of Daesh propaganda online has now dropped from six days to just 36 hours in the first six months of the year. But that is still 36 hours too long, and the challenge ahead of us remains significant. As we make progress in one area, the extremist threat shifts and we must redouble our efforts in others. Terrorist groups are aware that links to their propaganda are being removed more quickly and are placing a greater emphasis on disseminating content at speed in order to stay ahead.

Industry needs to go further and faster in automating the detection and

removal of terrorist content online and developing technological solutions which prevent it being uploaded in the first place. Our aim should be to ensure that links to new terrorist material are detected and removed within one to two hours. As it becomes harder for terrorists to share new propaganda and supporters look across the internet to re-share existing material, it is essential that companies prioritise the removal of legacy content and ensure it cannot be uploaded again.

The Forum is showing positive leadership in each of these areas, from expanding the sharing of digital fingerprints that help disrupt the distribution of terrorist content to investing in research to better understand the spread of this material. I look forward to progress being made by the G7 interior ministers' meeting in Rome in October.

I recognise this isn't something that we can fix overnight, but I know that together we can make significant strides in tackling this issue. And while this event and the Global Forum are about preventing terrorist propaganda from spreading online and radicalising our citizens, we must also work together to tackle the abuse of encrypted messaging apps to plan, direct and coordinate terrorist attacks. This is also something that we require greater company cooperation with and I hope that we can use the spirit of positive collaboration that we see here to make greater progress in that area in the future.

If we are to continue making progress in removing terrorist content online, governments must support the efforts of industry and civil society. That's why the UK called for the creation of the Global Internet Forum for Counter Terrorism and why I call on others in the room to support it today. In my remarks to the General Assembly last year, I emphasised the need to tackle all forms of extremism. Today, we have the opportunity to call on countries, industry and communities around the world to do everything possible, online and offline, to tackle those attempting to radicalise our young people. And if we do so, we can protect our citizens against those who would harm them, and we can help to build a safer world.

I would now like to invite my co-host, President Emmanuel Macron, to give his reflections on this challenge. And I value the very close partnership that the UK has had with France in addressing this issue, particularly following the launch of the UK-France action plan in July of this year. And I'd like to thank the President for his strong, personal support and commitment to driving this agenda forward.