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Written by **Veronika Kyrylenko** on June 11, 2021

U.S. State Department Condemns Nigeria for Banning Twitter

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The U.S. Department of State on Thursday condemned the Nigerian government for suspending Twitter and targeting individuals who use the social-media site, including Nigerian broadcasters, and called for the African nation to reverse its decision.

"The United States condemns the ongoing suspension of Twitter by the Nigerian government and subsequent threats to arrest and prosecute Nigerians who use Twitter. The United States is likewise concerned that the Nigerian National Broadcasting Commission ordered all television and radio broadcasters to cease using Twitter," says the press statement from Ned Price, the department's spokesperson.

Claiming that the United States supports Nigeria "as it works towards unity, peace, and prosperity," Price argued that "freedom of expression and access to information both online and offline are foundational to prosperous and secure democratic societies."

As a "partner," the United States called on the Nigerian government to respect its citizens' right to "freedom of expression" by reversing this suspension.

It was the first official reaction from the Biden administration on the issue, and comes almost a week after the government in Abuja announced a suspension of Twitter in Nigeria and a push to have all social platforms licensed through the National Broadcasting Commission, the same as the legacy media.

Price's statement also echoed Twitter's own, issued on June 5, calling access to their platform "an essential human right in modern society."

The current standoff began when Twitter invoked the same pretext it had used to censor Trump during the 2020 riots in the United States — that he "incited violence" or threatened harm to a known individual or group — to take down a tweet by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari warning separatists against setting police stations on fire.

BBC reported that Buhari's blocked tweet warned, "Many of those misbehaving today are too young to be aware of the destruction and loss of lives that occurred during the Nigerian Civil War. Those of us in the fields for 30 months, who went through the war, will treat them in the language they understand."

The Nigerian president's account then retweeted a video in which he said, "Whoever wants the destruction of the system will soon have the shock of their lives. We've given them enough time.... We will treat them in the language they understand."

Twitter responded (in the language it understands) by saying that Buhari's post "was in violation of the

'Twitter Rules'," and saying the account owner will be required to delete the violating tweet. The tweet was subsequently removed by Twitter and Buhari spent 12 hours with his account in read-only mode.

Following Twitter's decision, Buhari called out the social-media giant by saying its move was biased and said the president had a right to express his thoughts on events that affect the country. He also raised suspicion about the platform's agenda in the country.

In retaliation to Twitter's treatment of Buhari, Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed announced that the U.S.-based firm's Nigerian operations would be "suspended indefinitely." He also cited Twitter's "persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence."

The minister told journalists on Wednesday that Twitter has reached out to the government for talks after Nigerian telecom firms were ordered to suspend access to the platform. To be restored in Nigeria, Twitter should register as a local entity and be licensed in the country, Muhammad said.

The minister added that Twitter has become a platform for incitement of violence by the banned Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group, which is pushing for an independent state for the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria. He also accused the platform of helping to facilitate funding for last year's violent protests against police brutality in the country.

Despite the United Nations and human rights groups voicing concerns over the crackdown on Twitter in Africa's most populous state, Mohammed claimed that "nobody in actual honesty can accuse Nigeria of stifling freedom of expression," referring to a large number of TV channels, radio stations, and online platforms in the country. "But there's one line you must not cross," he added.

Not surprisingly, Twitter's recent actions in the United States reveal a corporation not all that concerned with users' ability to "communicate with the world" and exercising "an essential human right" if they challenge the ultra-liberal Silicon Valley orthodoxy.

Twitter's executives used to describe the platform as "the free speech wing of the free speech party," but bans and suspensions have become a common practice against users posting "misinformation," which essentially means any content that deviates from the mainstream media consensus or undermines the political goals of the Democratic Party.

"Man," former Republican congressional candidate Joshua Foxworth tweeted, "you have to admire the sheer cognitive dissonance here."

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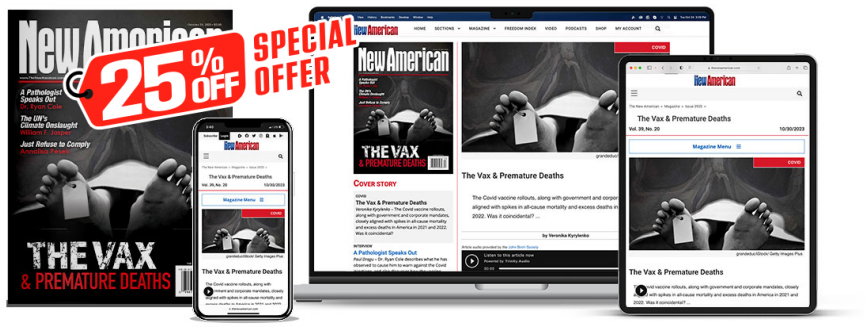

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