November 4, 2026

To: Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer, Google; and Neal Mohan, Chief Executive Officer, YouTube

Subject: Demand for Transparency and Restoration of YouTube Channels Restricted at the Request of Saudi Authorities

Dear Mr. Pichai and Mr. Mohan,

We write on behalf of the American Committee for Middle East Rights (ACMER), Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), ALQST for Human Rights, MENA Rights Group, and the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR) concerning YouTube's reported restrictions on channels and content belonging to Saudi dissidents, journalists, and independent media figures following complaints or requests from Saudi authorities.

In May 2026, Saudi-British activist and media personality Ghanem al-Masarir reportedly received notice from YouTube that two of his channels, together attracting more than 800,000 subscribers, would be blocked inside Saudi Arabia following complaints from a government entity.

The reported restrictions raise serious concerns about the ability of Saudi authorities to use local legal requirements to prevent people inside the Kingdom from accessing independent commentary and reporting produced abroad.

Country-specific restrictions are not necessarily equivalent to global removal. Nevertheless, when a government can prevent its population from accessing an entire channel because of peaceful political commentary, the effect can be to suppress legitimate expression without requiring the platform to establish that the channel as a whole violates its own rules.

The Saudi government relies on broadly worded legal provisions, including Article 6 of its Anti-Cyber Crime Law, to criminalize material alleged to threaten public order, religious values, public morals, or privacy. Saudi authorities have used online expression as a basis for severe criminal penalties against journalists, activists, and ordinary users.

Google's human rights responsibilities require more than automatically implementing local legal demands. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights call

on companies to assess the human rights implications of government requests and to take appropriate steps to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts.

We are particularly concerned that channel-level restrictions may deprive users inside Saudi Arabia of access to extensive libraries of journalism, political commentary, and human rights content, including material unrelated to the government's complaint.

You are also the "American tech platform" to which the U.S. government has addressed its own policy. On May 28, 2025, Secretary of State Rubio declared it "unacceptable for foreign officials to demand that American tech platforms adopt global content moderation policies or engage in censorship activity that reaches beyond their authority and into the United States." We are separately asking the State and Treasury Departments to apply the same measures to the Saudi officials responsible, and the House Judiciary Committee to add these orders to its inquiry into foreign censorship demands on your companies.

We ask Google and YouTube to answer the following questions:

1. Provide the full text of every Saudi government request, legal complaint, or order received in 2026 concerning YouTube channels or videos operated by dissidents, journalists, activists, or human rights organizations.
2. Identify the government entities that submitted the requests and the legal provisions invoked.
3. Confirm whether the reported restrictions on Ghanem al-Masarir's two channels were implemented, when they took effect, and what content they cover.
4. Identify the specific videos or other material alleged to violate Saudi law and explain why any restriction was applied at the video or channel level.
5. Explain the legal and human rights assessment conducted before implementing each restriction, including the standards used to evaluate legality, necessity, and proportionality.
6. Explain whether YouTube considered narrower measures, including restricting specific videos rather than entire channels.
7. State whether the affected channel owners were given meaningful notice, access to the legal basis for the decision, and an opportunity to appeal before the restrictions took effect.
8. Explain whether Google or YouTube challenged, sought clarification of, or attempted to narrow the Saudi requests.
9. Disclose whether any content posted by users in the United States was removed globally in connection with these requests.

10. Explain the role of Google's regional offices, employees, contractors, or partners in processing the requests and whether commercial relationships with Saudi state-linked entities were considered.
11. Identify any comparable requests received from other governments in the region concerning independent journalism, political commentary, or human rights advocacy.

We ask Google and YouTube to take the following actions:

1. Restore access inside Saudi Arabia to every affected channel that does not violate YouTube's own rules.
2. Publish the Saudi requests and orders, together with the legal and human rights assessments conducted, to the fullest extent legally possible.
3. Provide each affected channel owner with the specific content at issue, the legal provision invoked, and a meaningful appeal mechanism.
4. Commit to applying restrictions narrowly and to avoiding channel-level blocking when a narrower measure would address a specific, substantiated legal concern.
5. Adopt and publish safeguards against government requests that seek to suppress peaceful political speech, journalism, or human rights advocacy.
6. Publish transparent, country-specific data on government requests, including requesting agencies, legal bases, affected channels, restrictions imposed, and appeals.
7. Meet with the undersigned organizations and affected users within 30 days.

YouTube has become an important source of independent reporting and public debate. Restricting entire channels at the request of a government that criminalizes peaceful online expression risks depriving millions of people of access to information and undermining the platform's responsibility to respect human rights.

We request a written response within 7 days. We intend to make this letter and YouTube's response public.

Sincerely,

The American Committee for Middle East Rights (ACMER)
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
ALQST for Human Rights
MENA Rights Group
The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR)