

**On 12 September 2018, Ciné-ONU screened *The Cleaners*, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to highlight the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Cinéma Galeries in Brussels.**



The film focuses on the lives of the people responsible for removing online content for companies such as Twitter, Facebook and Google. Every day, these moderators remove at least 25,000 pieces of content – images and videos that are often sexually explicit, or terrorist related – which severely impacts the mental health of these employees. Although these companies are American, the moderators could be anywhere in the world, outsourced by private firms. For the most part, they're based in developing countries – 'The Cleaners' is set in The Philippines.

The film raises questions relating to Article 19 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the right to freedom of opinion and expression. What content should be deleted? Should governments be able to dictate what gets deleted? How accountable are these corporations for

what content gets published? Since social media law is a relatively new and developing subject, there is a lot which remains unanswered.

The screening was followed by a panel discussion with: Tim Engelhardt, from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Cornelia Kutterer, EU Government Affairs and Digital Policy Director at Microsoft; Maryant Fernàndez Pérez, Senior Policy Advisor at European Digital Rights (EDRi); and was moderated by Carlos Jimenez, from the UN's Regional Information Centre (UNRIC).



The panelists agreed that the film was thought-provoking and gave an introduction to a range of complex topics, from freedom of expression to accountability and workers' rights.

Cornelia Kutterer remarked that it was an “incredible, disturbing film that comes at the right time. It talks about a lot of issues that, in themselves, have a lot of complexity. For instance, the terms of use that these platforms adopt are very broad, and the laws around these issues are different from country to country. There's a very complex triangle of stakeholders: communities, governments and companies.”

Maryant Fernàndez Pérez highlighted three aspects which the film highlighted for her: “One, there's a dominance of a few players (mainly YouTube, Facebook and Twitter) so there's a competition problem. Two, they're there to make money, not there to protect the public, which causes problems for freedom of expression and privacy. Companies have allowed these posts, such as the one's published through elections, to be there because they make money. Three, the risks of outsourcing cleaners. They act as policemen, but they don't know the laws around the world. They receive training but they're not specialists.”

Tim Engelhardt agreed that the film depicts an enormous array of issues: “It really touches upon

the side of workers' rights, health, mental health, and at the same time, freedom of expression related issues. Another aspect to highlight is that the film has global reach. We see the real impacts that countries like Myanmar are facing because of the content that is being published on these types of platform." And added: "the International Human Rights framework is a crucial starting point to provide a global perspective because it has a common language."



The panelists raised their own questions. Cornelia noted that social media platforms do not currently see themselves as traditional news editors, but should they? And Maryant suggests we should question both companies' and governments' motivations for deleting content.

Beyond accountability and motives, though, Tim highlighted that the hate which can be amplified through these social media platforms exists outside of online realms. He ended discussions by quoting a Sri Lankan minister, who said: "We have all of this hate going on but the germs are cultivated among our society, Facebook is just the wind."

The Cleaners is one of three films which are being screened to highlight and celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moldovan Miracle will be screened at Cinéma Galeries on 23 October and Jaha's Promise on 4 December.

- To watch the trailer, [click here](#) .
- To see pictures from the evening, [click here](#) .
- For more information about the film, [click here](#) .
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