

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2022

Robert Kotick  
Chief Executive Officer  
Activision Blizzard, Inc.  
3100 Ocean Park Boulevard  
Santa Monica, CA 90405 USA

Dear Mr. Kotick,

We are writing to better understand the processes you have in place to handle player reports of harassment and extremism encounters in your online games, and ask for consideration of safety measures pertaining to anti-harassment and anti-extremism. We know that online games, like the ones you create, are widely used spaces where millions of people overwhelmingly report experiencing positive social behaviors and find a sense of community and belonging with other players.<sup>1</sup> However, they are also spaces where hate, harassment, and extremism can proliferate, and we are concerned about the total volume as well as the increase in player reports of these negative encounters.

According to the Anti-Defamation League's recent report *Hate Is No Game: Hate and Harassment in Online Games 2022*, 77% of adults and 66% of teens have reported experiencing harassment in online games, up from 71% of adults and 60% of teens since last year; the numbers are just as high for children ages 10-12, 60% of whom have reported the same kind of harassment.<sup>2</sup> This represents almost 80 million American adults and over 16 million Americans under the age of 18 encountering some form of discrimination, physical threats, and sexual harassment, among many other kinds of hateful behavior.<sup>3</sup> This in-game harassment has lasting effects that continue into the real world, where people report negative impacts on school performance, disruptions in their personal relationships, and feelings of isolation, depression, and suicidal ideation.<sup>4</sup>

In particular, identity-based harassment based on protected classes such as gender, race, religion, and disability status have largely been on the rise, leading many people to hide their identities while gaming online.<sup>5</sup> This identity-based harassment has intersectionality with the amount of conspiracy theories and misinformation reported, where topics such as Holocaust denialism, anti-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (May 3, 2022), <https://www.adl.org/hateisnogame>.

<sup>2</sup> ADL Center for Technology and Society, *Hate Is No Game: Hate and Harassment in Online Games 2022*, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (Dec. 6, 2022), <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/hate-no-game-hate-and-harassment-online-games-2022>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

immigrant rhetoric, and covid-related anti-Asian sentiment are still prevalent.<sup>6</sup> One third of gamers report feeling unwelcome in gaming communities, which increases for those from underrepresented groups.<sup>7</sup> The majority of American gamers say that diversity, equity and inclusion are important, and want game companies to take a stance on issues of social causes and health and wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

Especially concerning is the rise of exposure to white-supremacist extremism in online game spaces – 15% of gamers under 18 and 20% of adults (up more than double from last year’s count of 8%) have reported these kinds of encounters.<sup>9</sup> White supremacists actively use online games as recruitment spaces for their ideologies, using in-game voice and text chat to on-ramp people to their beliefs, often targeting vulnerable youths.<sup>10</sup> Authorities around the world like the United States’ Department of Homeland Security and the EU’s Radicalisation Awareness Network are taking notice and launching investigations into how extremists use online gaming spaces to radicalize young people.<sup>11</sup> People looking for a sense of belonging and community in online games are vulnerable to these kinds of recruitment tactics, especially youths who are still learning and forming their worldviews.

We know that Activision Blizzard, Inc. is dedicated to creating online gaming spaces where people can find positive experiences and a sense of community with those who cherish the same games. However, the widespread presence of in-game hate, harassment, and extremism in these spaces undermines this goal and creates unsafe experiences that are negatively affecting gamers of all ages and backgrounds. Given the rise of extremism – especially white supremacist ideology – around the world, it is important that online video game developers work to stop the spread of harassment and extremist ideologies that proliferate on their platforms.

With this in mind, we ask for a response to the following by January 9, 2023:

1. How are you assessing and mitigating the risks and harms of in-game harassment and extremism in your online games? What plans do you have to further address this issue?
2. What mechanisms do you have in-game and externally (such as official websites, forums, and support pages) for players to report in-game harassment?

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Minh Tue Le Ngoc, *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Games: Gamers Want Less Toxicity in Games and Want Publishers to Take a Stance*, NEWZOO INTERNATIONAL B.V. (Apr. 8, 2022), <https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/newzoos-gamer-sentiment-diversity-inclusion-gender-ethnicity-sexual-identity-disability>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> ADL Center for Technology and Society, *Hate Is No Game: Hate and Harassment in Online Games 2022*, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (Dec. 6, 2022), <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/hate-no-game-hate-and-harassment-online-games-2022>.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Young, *Extremists Use Video Games to Recruit Vulnerable Youth. Here’s What Parents and Gamers Need to Know*, THE CONVERSATION US, INC. (Nov. 9, 2022), <https://theconversation.com/extremists-use-video-games-to-recruit-vulnerable-youth-heres-what-parents-and-gamers-need-to-know-193110>.

<sup>11</sup> *Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (Nov. 21, 2022), <https://www.dhs.gov/tvtpgrants>. See also Linda Schlegel, *Extremists’ Use of Gaming (Adjacent) Platforms – Insights Regarding Primary and Secondary Prevention Measures*, EUROPEAN COMMISSION (Aug. 2021), [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-08/ran\\_extremists\\_use\\_gaming\\_platforms\\_082021\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-08/ran_extremists_use_gaming_platforms_082021_en.pdf).

3. How are player reports of in-game harassment handled, how large is the team that reviews those reports, and what automated tools are used in-game and by your review team? What investments are you making in ensuring the development and improvement of these systems?
4. How do you integrate feedback from groups that represent communities most impacted by online hate and harassment into the process of improving reporting in your games?
5. How do you identify extremist content in your games? Can you specify which of your currently existing policies address extremist content?
6. What data do you collect on in-game player reporting mechanisms and automatic bans for inappropriate behavior? Will you consider releasing those data in regular transparency reporting?

Sincerely,  
[[SIGNATURES]]