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The Asia for Animals (AfA) Coalition is composed of 23 well-known and respected animal welfare organisations that have a shared focus on improving the welfare of animals in Asia. The coalition is further supported by a global network of hundreds of animal welfare organisations working together to tackle issues across Asia as one voice.

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Animal cruelty content should be included in the UK's Online Safety Bill

Animal abuse is ubiquitous and profitable on social media, and self-regulation has failed. The AfA Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition believes that the UK government should step in.

7th October 2021, United Kingdom - The Asia for Animals (AfA) Coalition has asked Member of Parliament Damian Collins to ensure that animal cruelty content (1) is explicitly included in the scope of the UK government's forthcoming Online Safety Bill. Mr Collins is the Chair of the UK Parliamentary Joint Committee established by the House of Lords and the House of Commons to scrutinise the proposed Online Safety Bill, the aim of which is to establish a new regulatory framework to increase accountability of online technology companies and protect users from harmful online content.

Animal cruelty content on social media is a serious and growing animal welfare issue. Its easy availability, and the failure of the tech platforms to self-regulate, also puts people at risk - particularly children and young adults, whose psychological development can be negatively affected by witnessing animal abuse (2). Animal cruelty content is produced in countries around the world. Regardless of where it is produced, its audience is global, and this is an issue of concern worldwide - including in the UK.

According to the RSPCA, nearly a quarter of UK schoolchildren aged 10-18 years had witnessed animal cruelty or neglect on social media (3). The AfA Coalition's Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) expects this shocking number to rise with the rapid proliferation of online animal cruelty content.

SMACC recently published their findings on the nature and volume of animal cruelty content available on three major social media platforms (4). Several dozen of the 5,480 cruelty

content videos they documented were filmed in the UK, and several hundred were uploaded from the UK (second only to Indonesia and the USA). At the time the report was published, the videos had collectively been **viewed 5,347,809,262 times**.

Sarah Grant, Asia for Animals and SMACC Coalition Coordinator, says that *“most of the videos we documented were clearly produced just for sharing on social media, for likes, shares, or even for profit. We saw films of kittens being crushed; fully conscious animals being eaten alive; baby monkeys teased, hit, near-drowned - even buried alive.”*

SMACC documented numerous “fake rescue” videos, in which animals are subjected to stressful, dangerous situations or harmed in order to be ‘rescued’ on camera. “Monkey hatred” content is also widespread on social media, often on channels or pages that exist solely to promote content showing monkeys being tormented, severely injured and abused. Over seven hundred of the 5,480 videos SMACC documented involved primate abuse.

Despite YouTube’s stated ban on animal abuse or violence, SMACC documented thousands of violent or otherwise abusive videos, some of which had been live for years. Of the 41 such videos that were reported to YouTube in August - all of which were freely available online in the UK - all but one were still available a week later.

Sarah Kite, of SMACC member Action for Primates, argues that *“self-regulation by the tech platforms is not working, and effective legislation is required. Social media platforms have failed to effectively police or enforce their own guidelines, to stop this harmful content. They’re just not doing what they claim to do.”*

The SMACC Coalition urges the Joint Committee to explicitly bring animal cruelty content within the scope of duties imposed on tech platforms by the proposed Online Safety Bill. Online platforms should be legally obliged to implement and enforce strict guidelines prohibiting animal cruelty content, and thereby protecting the most vulnerable in society from harm.

The Asia for Animals Coalition is a global network of animal welfare and conservation organizations with a shared goal of reducing animal suffering across Asia and around the world. The AfA SMACC Coalition includes: *Action for Primates; The Animals Asia Foundation; Humane Society International; International Animal Rescue; Lady Freethinker; PETA Asia; and World Animal Protection*

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References:

1. SMACC defines animal cruelty as “a range of human behaviours, performed intentionally or unintentionally, that cause animals harm or suffering which may be immediate or long-term, physical, emotional, or psychological”.
2. McDonald, S. E., Dmitrieva, J., Shin, S., Hitti, S. A., Graham-Bermann, S. A., Ascione, F. R., & Williams, J. H. (2017). The role of callous/unemotional traits in mediating the association between animal abuse exposure and behavior problems among children exposed to intimate

partner violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 72, 421–432.

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3. RSPCA. (2018). Twenty three percent of kids have seen animal abuse online. Royal Society for the Protection of Animals. https://www.rspca.org.uk/-/16_10_18_genkind
4. SMACC. (2021). Making Money from Misery: How Social Media Giants Profit from Animal Abuse. Asia for Animals Coalition. https://8db0f3ba-2353-4948-8498-b09d7964c3a5.filesusr.com/ugd/2dec39_b0a6a0ae309346e3a02e3aa0a33f792f.pdf

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