

## GOOGLE PUTS HUMAN LIVES ABOVE FREEDOM OF SPEECH: BLOCKS PROVOCATIVE VIDEO AS VIOLENCE ESCALATES



Google's blocking access to YouTube movie trailer that was considered inflammatory and one that purportedly incited deadly violence in many countries with sizeable Muslim populations, has raised questions of responsibility and censorship. Was Google right in blocking it? Did they make ineffective principles as vital as freedom of speech and the free flow of information? Undoubtedly their decision was made with the best of intentions and one can hardly question putting human lives above everything else. Even the most die-hard defenders of free speech will find it hard to question Google's motives. The dilemma they faced was indeed very hard to resolve. Kevin Bankston of the Center for Democracy and Technology questions if it send a message to the rioters that their reprehensible but vicious behavior could cow down their detractors into submission. Eva Galperin of the Electronic Freedom Foundation said that she was disappointed and "I'm not sure they did the right thing." Google also may be harboring second thoughts about their decision because it hasn't led to a let up in the violence, if anything the violence has increased and there are signs of it escalating further. Allowing an inciting piece of news to remain where it is allows it to die a natural death. Banning it actually intensifies its strength and makes it more powerful than what it actually is. Banning could actually breathe new life into it. Those who saw the offending trailer *'Innocence of Muslims'* found it a juvenile attempt by amateurish makers, an insignificant piece of work and nothing creative about it. Sure it was spiteful and malicious, and its crude characterization of the Prophet Mohammed justifiably offended many believers, but certainly it was not so incendiary that it could incite such strong reactions from all concerned. It would be safe to assume that most of the rioters, be they in Libya, Egypt or Benghazi, have not seen the video. If and when they do they'll probably feel stupid that they made such a big ado about nothing. Now thanks to the blocking, they will probably not be able to see the silly video and will attribute something even more ominous and sinister than what it was. Google of course does have the right to decide what content it will permit and what it will not. However, it probably acted in haste, business interest maybe prevailing in the decision, probably more than ethical ones. However, how one wishes that if it did have to make a wrong judgment, it would have been on the side of upholding freedom of expression. By blocking the site it has added extra dimensions and made it bigger than what it is. Peter Spiro, a constitutional and international law professor at Temple University in Philadelphia said, that since Google is known as "the world's gatekeeper for information," and if they buckle down to threats there's little the rest of us can do anything about it, but it "makes this episode an even more significant one if Google broadens the block." Google has been known to take a tough stance against requests for videos to be removed. It refused to remove videos showing a Canadian citizen urinating on his passport and flushing it down the toilet and it also did not heed a request by the Pakistan government to withdraw videos lampooning Pakistani officials. By taking on the role of arbitrator Google has opened itself to similar demands and if they refuse, than they will stand vulnerable to allegations of having different yardsticks for different situations.