

13th October 2020

Dear Katie O'Donovan,

As organisations that defend freedom of expression in the UK, we are writing to you regarding concerns raised by journalists, MPs and members of the public about the availability of the 'Great Barrington Declaration' website via Google's search engine.

The Declaration, authored by three epidemiologists, calls for a policy of 'focused protection' rather than lockdowns in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and currently has over 250,000 signatures. Signatories include scientists, politicians and concerned citizens.

It has been observed that search results for the 'Great Barrington Declaration' have recently changed. Previously, a search for the Declaration returned the Declaration website, <https://gbdeclaration.org>, as the top result. In recent days, the same search has not returned the Declaration website in the first pages of results.

Could you please clarify:

- Has Google taken any action that affected the Declaration's search results?
- If so, what action has been taken, what what justification, and on whose authorisation?
- Have any Google employees discussed this matter with any members or representatives of the UK Government?
- If so, please provide details.

The right to freedom of expression protects our ability to freely share ideas, opinions and information without interference. It is through a free forum of ideas that citizens understand, contextualise, critique and trust information, not through harsh restrictions on information sharing. In a democracy, this vital right is not restricted to information that supports government policies.

During this crisis, trust is incredibly important. Trust is damaged when information and opinions are suppressed.

We hope that Google will protect freedom of expression during this testing time for democracies around the world, now more than ever.

Yours sincerely,

Silkie Carlo, Director, Big Brother Watch

Gabrielle Guillemin, Senior Legal Officer, ARTICLE 19

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