

Google, siding with Saudi Arabia, refuses to remove widely-criticized government app which lets men track and beat women and control their travel

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Mohammed bin Salman (center), the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, with Google CEO Sundar Pichai (left) and co-founder Sergey Brin (right).

Getty Images

- Google has rejected calls to remove a Saudi government app which offers a tool for men to control where women travel.
- The company told the office of Democratic Rep. Jackie Speier, who had called for its removal, that the app does not violate its terms of service.
- INSIDER reported extensively how the app — called Absher — [lets men direct where women can travel, and offers alerts](#) when they use a passport to leave Saudi Arabia.

- US Reps. Jackie Speier, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib, and 11 others demanded on February 21 that Apple and Google axe the app.
- Google and Apple CEO Tim Cook both promised to investigate the app. Apple have yet to announce their ruling.
- Speier told INSIDER: "The responses received so far from Apple and Google are deeply unsatisfactory."

Google has declined to remove from its app store a Saudi government app which lets men track women and control where they travel, on the grounds that it meets all their terms and conditions.

Google reviewed the app — called Absher — and concluded that it does not violate any agreements, and can therefore remain on the Google Play store.

The decision was communicated by Google to the office of Rep. Jackie Speier, a California Democrat who, with other members of Congress, wrote last week to demand they remove the service.

Google did not respond to a request for comment on the decision.

INSIDER last month reported how Absher — an all-purpose app which Saudis use to interact with the state — [offers features which allow Saudi men to grant and rescind travel permission for women, and to set up SMS alerts for when women use their passports.](#)

From left to right, Apple's Tim Cook, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Google CEO Sundar Pichai.

Reuters

Rep. Speier and 13 colleagues in Congress [wrote to Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Apple CEO Tim Cook on February 21, demanding that the app be removed.](#)

They and gave a deadline of Thursday 28 February to explain why the app is hosted on Google Play.

Read more: [Saudi Arabia tried to justify its app that lets men control where women travel amid a firestorm of criticism](#)

The 14 — including Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Katherine Clark, and Jackie Speier — said that Google and Apple are "accomplices in the oppression of Saudi Arabian women" for hosting the app.

A composite image of Ilhan Omar (L) and Rashida Tlaib (R) who called Apple and Google "accomplices in the oppression of Saudi Arabian women."

AP/Getty

Apple told Speier's office on Thursday they are still [reviewing Absher](#), following [calls from Senator Ron Wyden for them to "stop stalling"](#) and make a decision.

Apple has also not responded to a request for comment from INSIDER.

Rep. Speier told INSIDER: "The responses received so far from Apple and Google are deeply unsatisfactory."

"As of today, the Absher app remains available in both the Apple App store and the Google Play Store even though they can easily

remove it."

On this Absher form guardians can say where women can go, how long for, and which airports they can go to.
Absher

"Not only do they have the capability to take action, they have done so previously with the removal of the Living Hope Ministries app, which encouraged users to 'convert' LGBTQ individuals, based on its ability to cause harm."

"Facilitating the detention of women seeking asylum and fleeing abuse and control unequivocally causes harm. I will be following up on this issue with my colleagues," Rep. Speier said.

Google Play's [app developer terms of service state](#):

"We don't allow apps that promote violence, or incite hatred against individuals or groups based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, age, nationality, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or any other characteristic that is associated with systemic discrimination or marginalization."