

Elon Musk restores suspended Twitter accounts of journalists

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New York, December 18 (RHC)-- Elon Musk has reinstated the Twitter accounts of several journalists after they were suspended on the platform following a controversy over publishing public data about the

billionaire's plane. The unprecedented suspensions caused a wave of criticism from government officials, advocacy groups and journalism organisations, with some saying it was jeopardising press freedom.

Musk then created a poll on his Twitter account, asking users how long the accounts should be suspended. It later showed a majority of respondents wanted the accounts restored immediately. "The people have spoken. Accounts who doxxed my location will have their suspension lifted now," Musk said in a tweet on Saturday. The suspended journalists included reporters from The New York Times, CNN, and The Washington Post and they have been reinstated.

Musk, who considers himself a "free speech absolutist," was criticized by officials from France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the European Union earlier who condemned the suspensions. French Minister of Industry Roland Lescure tweeted on Friday that, following Musk's suspension of journalists, he would suspend his own activity on Twitter.

Melissa Fleming, head of communications for the United Nations, tweeted she was "deeply disturbed" by the suspensions and that "media freedom is not a toy." The German Foreign Office warned Twitter it had a problem with moves that jeopardised press freedom.

The move affected Musk's electric car maker Tesla, slumping the company shares by 4.7 percent on Friday, posting their worst weekly loss since March 2020. The suspension of the accounts started over a disagreement regarding a Twitter account called ElonJet that tracked Musk's private plane using publicly available information.

In the past, Musk said he would not suspend the account in the name of free speech. But on Wednesday, Twitter suspended it and others that tracked private jets. Twitter also changed its privacy policy shortly after to prohibit the sharing of "live location information." "Criticizing me all day long is totally fine, but doxxing my real-time location and endangering my family is not," Musk wrote on Twitter, adding "the same doxxing rules apply to 'journalists' as to everyone else".

Musk later accused journalists of posting "basically assassination coordinates" in violation of the platform's policies, but he provided no evidence for that claim.

CNN's Donnie O'Sullivan, one of the suspended journalists, said he had not shared the precise live location of Musk's jet. Flight tracking data collected by the United States Federal Aviation Administration is public information and routinely shared online by private websites such as FlightAware and Flightradar24.

Twitter's head of trust and safety, Ella Irwin, said the team manually reviewed "any and all accounts" that violated the new privacy policy by posting direct links to the ElonJet account. "I understand that the focus seems to be mainly on journalist accounts, but we applied the policy equally to journalists and non-journalist accounts today," Irwin said in the email.

Since taking over the platform in a \$44 billion deal in October, Musk has slashed Twitter's workforce, overhauled its moderation policies, and restored previously banned accounts, including that of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

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