

Elon Musk hits back at Australian court order against X images of stabbing

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Elon Musk has hit back at the Australian internet watchdog's attempts to force his social media platform X into blocking users from seeing violent footage relating to the Sydney church stabbing. On Monday evening the Australian federal court ordered Elon Musk's X to hide posts containing videos of a stabbing at a Sydney church last week from users globally, after the eSafety commissioner launched an urgent court case seeking an injunction. Some hours later the American billionaire posted on his personal X account a cartoon showing the platform as a Wizard of Oz-style path to "freedom" and "truth" with a darker, alternative path to "censorship" and "propaganda". Above the cartoon Musk has written the message: "Don't take my word for it, just ask the Australian PM!" He also reposted a post on X highlighting a quote by Anthony Albanese on Monday in which the prime minister talked about the fact that "by and large" most social media sites had responded positively to the Australian attempts to block the footage. However, the post added the words "for censorship" to the prime minister's quote and claimed Albanese had taken time to "advertise for Elon". Above the post, Musk added the comment: "I'd like to take a moment to thank the PM for informing the public that this platform is the only truthful one." On Tuesday, Albanese said the government would "do what's necessary to take on this arrogant billionaire who thinks he's above the law, but also above common decency". He said the eSafety Commissioner was doing her job to protect the interests of Australians. "The idea that someone would go to court for the right to put up violent content on a platform shows how out-of-touch Mr Musk is," Albanese said. "Social media needs to have social responsibility with it. Mr Musk is not showing any." It followed a successful court bid on late on Monday by the eSafety commissioner to secure the order against X. X, along with Meta, were ordered by the eSafety commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, on Tuesday last week to remove material deemed to depict "gratuitous or offensive violence with a high degree of impact or detail" within 24 hours or potentially face fines. Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup The material was footage of the alleged stabbing of bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel last Monday evening while he was giving a livestreamed service at the Assyrian Christ the Good Shepherd church in Wakeley. In a hearing late on Monday afternoon, barrister for eSafety Christopher Tran told Justice Geoffrey Kennett that X had geo-blocked the posts containing the video, meaning Australians could not access them. However, the posts were still accessible globally, and to Australians who used a virtual private network (VPN) connection that made their IP address appear outside Australia. During a hastily arranged hearing, Tran said the "graphic and violent" video remained online on X, formerly known as Twitter. It would cause "irreparable harm" if it continued to circulate, Tran said. "That was a choice, they could have done more." At the least, X should shield the

footage from all users, not just Australians, he submitted. Anticipating an argument about the United States' right to free speech, Tran said it appeared that right did not extend to depictions of violence. Musk had earlier branded the eSafety commissioner the "Australian censorship commissar" while his company raised free speech and jurisdictional concerns over the takedown order. X also branded the internet cop's move an "unlawful and dangerous approach". Marcus Hoyne, appearing for X Corp, urged the court to postpone the matter until he could seek "sensible and proper instructions" from his San Francisco-based client. The eSafety commissioner's court application was served at the last possible moment, he said. Granting the order would affect international users "in circumstances where it has no impact on Australia," he said. His appeal failed, however. The judge granted the interim order sought, suppressing the footage to all users on X until at least Wednesday afternoon. The case will return to court on Wednesday for an argument about a permanent suppression.