An open letter to Mark Zuckerberg

Dear Mark,

You have said that "connecting the world is one of the greatest challenges of our generation." We all agree. We also believe that a connectivity agenda must include respect for the right for all to equally access, receive and impart information. For this reason, we are concerned about Facebook's [recent attacks](http://gadgets.ndtv.com/apps/news/facebook-launches-campaign-called-save-free-basics-778647) on the millions of internet users in India and around the world who have fought, and who continue to fight, for Net Neutrality.

First up we would like to acknoweldge that Facebook has positively responded to the public’s concerns by making important fixes to the security, privacy, and transparency of Internet.org and Free Basics. But we are troubled about a new petition you have launched. It encourages Facebook users to take action against Net Neutrality rules and protections being considered by the Indian regulatory authority, TRAI.

Facebook has been urging users in India, and Facebook users (mistakenly) in the U.S., to sign a petition that claims that "a small, vocal group of critics... demand that people pay equally to access all Internet services, even if that means one billion people can't afford to access any services," and "unless you take action now, India could lose access to free basic Internet services, delaying progress towards digital equality for all Indians."

These claims are disingenuous and serve only to create an oppositional camps that many of us have worked hard to overcome.

The fact is, this "small, vocal group" includes more than a million Indian users, elected political representatives, development workers, respected platforms and technology leaders.

It is concerning that Facebook — which says it supports Net Neutrality — would attack those who have sought to enshrine this fundamental principle in law. Such a move is an insult to millions and a strikes against the fast-growing global community that cares about safeguarding the open internet.

In addition, Facebook's actions embolden telcos in their efforts to stop Net Neutrality protections more broadly from being passed across the world — and particularly in emerging nations and elsewhere in the Global South — by creating the impression that there is a grass movement opposed to Net Neutrality. You have repeatedly voiced your support for Net Neutrality, so we are confused as to why Facebook is now portraying Net Neutrality advocates as opponents.

Meanwhile, in its quest to gain support for its controversial Free Basics program, Facebook continues to assert statistics and arguments — most recently in a full-page ad in some of India’s biggest newspapers — that lack proper sourcing and that set up straw man arguments.

Rather than create digital equality as your petition claims, Facebook’s Free Basics program risks exacerbating digital inequality. It creates a paradigm in which services from Facebook and its Free Basic partners are free, while everything else remains paid. The world's poorest people get partial access to the internet, while those who can afford it get all of it. If you think access to the internet is a right like access to health care and clean drinking water, then Facebook should support equal access to the entire internet for everyone.

Finally, it’s necessary to correct the public record on a crucial issue regarding Net Neutrality regulations. Contrary to another of [Facebook’s assertions](https://www.facebook.com/Internetdotorg/videos/939490222813700/), Net Neutrality rules in the European Union do not endorse the practice of zero rating. Rather, they leave room to flag zero rating as a Net Neutrality violation. Similar rules in the United States allow for consideration of violations on a case-by-case basis.

As India and other countries determine their Net Neutrality rules, we ask that Facebook meaningfully and respectfully engages with ordinary users, activists and advocates without engaging in unfair attacks.

Signed,