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# Facebook's legacy one of 'broken children'

Social media giants slated for not doing enough to prevent online child sex abuse, as inquiry ends

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FACEBOOK has been accused of leaving "broken children" as collateral damage in the wake of their commercial aims, the child sex abuse inquiry has heard. William Chapman, the

barrister representing the victims of abuse at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), said social media companies were not preventing paedophiles reaching children as it was "contrary to their business model" and that their apps needed to be "fundamentally redesigned".

Police also warned that tech firms were going ahead with plans to encrypt more features "in the certain knowledge" it would lead to more children being abused.

The warnings came as the inquiry drew to a close yesterday. Over the last

fortnight, the IICSA has heard evidence from Facebook, Apple, Microsoft and Google about their efforts to combat child abuse online.

In his closing statement, Mr Chapman singled out Facebook as the "unacceptable face of social media", citing that over half of reported grooming in 2017-18 related to the company or its Instagram and WhatsApp apps.

He said that social networks scanned for evidence of abuse after it happened and that they now needed to change their business model to stop abusers easily contacting children. Mr Chap-

man said: "What they will not do, because it is contrary to their business model, is to restrict the opportunities for abuse before it takes place.

"They leave behind broken children like so much collateral damage. Money, they say, is no object but none you heard from has a dedicated budget to tackling this problem."

Among the recommendations being made to the inquiry on behalf of victims are for tech companies pay compensation to those abused via their services and that a new criminal offence be made of posing online as a child

without a reasonable excuse. Mr Chapman also accused tech companies of not giving the inquiry a "straight answer" about the scale of abuse on their sites and selectively releasing figures without context.

Earlier in the hearing, Microsoft failed to provide figures for how many children had been groomed on its live chat services Xbox Live and Skype and Facebook was similarly unable to say how many registered sex offenders had been caught using its services.

"It is not acceptable to hide the extent of the problem on your plat-

form," said Mr Chapman. Later, Debra Powell QC, speaking for the National Police Chiefs Council, warned that tech giants' plans to make ever more services encrypted would lead to more children being abused.

Last month Facebook announced plans to add end-to-end encryption to its 1.3 billion-user Messenger service, meaning not even it will be able to see the content of messages.

Ms Powell said: "Ever greater privacy protections [will lead to] more children abused and exploited and their ordeals will go on for longer."