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For immediate release

New UN policy paper launched on countering and addressing online hate speech

New York, 05 July 2023 – The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has today launched a new policy paper on countering and addressing hate speech online.

The policy paper, [*Countering and Addressing Online Hate Speech: A Guide for Policy Makers and Practitioners*](#), was developed jointly by the UN Office with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Human Rights, Big Data and Technology Project at the University of Essex.

“We have seen across the world, and time, how social media has become a major vehicle in spreading hate speech at an unprecedented speed, threatening freedom of expression and a thriving public debate,” said Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, who is the global focal point on Hate Speech.

“We saw how the perpetrators in the incidents of identity-based violence used online hate to target, dehumanize and attack others, many of whom are already the most marginalized in society, including ethnic, religious, national or racial minorities, refugees and migrants, women and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics,” said Under-Secretary-General Nderitu.

Key recommendations in the policy paper include:

- Ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law when countering online hate speech, and apply these standards to content moderation, content curation and regulation
- Enhance transparency of content moderation, content curation and regulation
- Promote positive narratives to counter online hate speech, and foster user engagement and empowerment
- Ensure accountability, strengthen judicial mechanisms and enhance independent oversight mechanisms
- Strengthen multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation
- Advance community-based voices and formulate context-sensitive and knowledge-based policymaking and good practice to protect and empower groups and populations in vulnerable situations to counter online hate speech

The policy paper builds upon earlier initiatives, including [**The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech**](#), which seeks to enhance the UN’s response to the global spread and impact of hate speech. The Strategy makes a firm commitment to step up coordinated action to tackle hate speech, both at global and national levels, including the use of new technologies and engaging with social media to address online hate speech and promote positive narratives.

“Digital technologies and social media play a crucial role in tackling hate speech, through outreach, awareness-raising, providing access to information, and education,” noted the Special Adviser.

Today’s launch was a culmination of three years of expert consultations that began in 2020, with round table discussions with tech and social media companies that focused on their roles and responsibilities in addressing hate speech on their platforms, in line with human rights norms and standards, as per the UN Strategy and Plan of Action. These discussions also involved the UN Working Group on Hate Speech, as well as experts and practitioners in this field, including from civil society.

The launch event gathered practitioners’ views and perspectives on the policy recommendations, while identifying concrete areas of opportunity or commitment to engage stakeholders in implementing the policy at global, regional, and national level.

“The transformation of our lives into a hybrid format, with the share of our life spent online ever increasing, ensuring that we all enjoy the same rights online as we do offline has become ever more important,” noted Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Deputy Director, Essex Human Rights, Big Data and Technology Project and former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

He highlighted some of the rights that could be negatively impacted by online hate speech, including the right to freedom of expression and access to information, right to physical integrity, freedom from being targeted by incitement to violence and discrimination, right to education, and other rights.

“Proliferation of hate speech online as a result of lack of adequate, appropriate responses to hate speech, can restrict and undermine access to the internet and the enjoyment of these rights online and ultimately, offline as well,” noted Mr. Shaheed, warning that “more immediate than these digital divides, perhaps, and more blatant in outcome, are the acts of violence that follow from online incitement to violence, including mass atrocities.”

The policy paper launched today aims to share the main recommendations from those expert consultations and to promote a broad-based mobilization on actions to further enhance efforts to tackle online hate speech.

“Unfortunately, our investment in countering online hate has not yet matched the reality of its dissemination and impact online. And it remains our responsibility, of all relevant stakeholders, to step up our efforts to preserve the hard-won gains achieved to-date in advancing non-discrimination and equality,” concluded Special Adviser Nderitu.

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