

# UNITED NATIONS PRESS RELEASE



*For immediate release*

## **Investing in the power of young people is the best chance the world can have to counter and address hate speech**

**New York, 18 June 2024** – In a message to mark the third International Day for Countering Hate Speech United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has underlined today the critical need for participation of young people, particularly girls and young women, indigenous youth, young people from minority communities, LGBTIQ+ youth, and young people with disabilities, as “crucial to create public and online spaces free from hate speech”.

“As young people are often most affected by hate speech, particularly online, young people must be part of the solution,” he said, noting that hate speech is a marker of discrimination, abuse, violence, conflict, and even crimes against humanity. “Governments, local authorities, religious, corporate and community leaders have a duty to invest in measures to promote tolerance, diversity and inclusivity, and to challenge hate speech in all its forms” he added.

Mr. Guterres’ message was delivered by his Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the UN Focal Point on Hate Speech, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, at the high-level commemoration event held at the UN headquarters in New York.

Co-organized by the Office of the Special Adviser and the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco, the event focused on the engagement with youth leaders, listening to the voices of youth and investing in young people’s efforts to counter hate speech. The role of the young people is also recognized in the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, which was launched five years ago by the Secretary-General, providing a framework to tackle both the root causes and impacts of hate speech on societies.

Speaking after delivering the Secretary-General’s message, his Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and UN Focal Point on Hate Speech, stressed that young people have “a powerful voice to speak up and act against hate speech. To ensure that hate speech is not disseminated and shared. And to take a stand when they see it.”

“The negative impact of hate speech on peace, sustainable development, human rights and the prevention of genocide and related crimes continues to be witnessed across the world. No region has been spared and the negative consequences for the victims targeted by such hate speech is devastating and long-lasting. This international day serves as a reminder of the importance of tackling hate speech, and it is a call for us all to do more,” added Special Adviser Nderitu.

In his opening remarks, the President of the UN General Assembly, Dennis Francis noted that “in all we do, we must reflect the values of harmony, tolerance, understanding and respect which is foundational to vibrant healthy societies resilient to violence. In order to succeed [in countering hate speech], we must engage the world’s 1.2 billion young people. They are often the first ones to be exposed to online hate as targets, victims, or bystanders. We must empower these new generations of digital citizens to recognize, reject and stand up to hate speech.”

Speaking at the event, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the UN, Omar Hilale, underlined that the international day serves “more than a moment of contemplation, but is a real call to action to combat and counter hate speech that threatens the fundamentals of human rights and dignity, and undermines peace stability and development worldwide”, while sharing the example of Morocco’s strategy of involving youth at the heart of policies.

Other speakers at the event included the Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, Felipe Paullier, UNICEF Special Adviser on Child Rights, Manuel Fontaine, Chief of Staff and Special Advisor to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, Pablo Espiniella, UNDP Crisis Bureau a.i. Head of Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Responsive Institutions, Helena Sterwe, UN DESA Officer in Charge of Division for Inclusive Social Development, Wenyan Yang, Senior Specialist for Inclusive Peace for the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Jessica Roland and Sarah Oliver, Global Youth and Learning Coordinator at United Religious Initiative.

The panel discussion was opened with a feature of the voices of youth activists from across the world, stressing the challenges they face and activities they’re carrying out to address them. Panelists recognized the vicious cycle of hate speech, which causes damage on an individual level, starting with impacting children, and on a community level when it spreads, incites to violence, and can lead to conflicts. Whilst young people, as heard during the event, are not just pointing out the problems, but are rising to the challenge, taking roles of responsibility, and sending out loud messages to the leaders in many corners of the world, they continue to face barriers, including in accessing platforms for decision-making and contributing thereto, and for accessing information, as well as education and technology.

Empowering young people with knowledge, tools, and opportunities, investing in their agency, and ensuring their safety and security as they claim the right to be part of the civic space remains not only one of the priorities across the United Nations system, but also an important tool that many stakeholders have at disposal for countering the insidious threat of hate speech across the world.

The International Day for Countering Hate Speech was created in 2021, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/309 on *Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech* spearheaded by the Kingdom of Morocco.

Find the recording of the entire [high-level event here](#); and quotes from the [speakers here](#).

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