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UN chief calls for renewed efforts to counter ‘toxic and destructive phenomenon’ of hate speech

New York, 19 June 2023 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has today urged renewed efforts to counter the ‘toxic and destructive phenomenon’ of hate speech, in a message to mark the second anniversary of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech.

“Hate speech is used to stoke fear and division, often for political gain, and at immense cost to communities and societies. It incites violence, exacerbates tensions, and impedes efforts to foster mediation and dialogue. It is one of the warning signs of genocide and other atrocity crimes,” he said.

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 an event to commemorate the day at the UN headquarters in New York.

Co-organized by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco, the event focused on showcasing positive examples of the UN and its partners implementing country-level action to counter and address hate speech, in line with the [United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#). The Secretary-General spotlighted the strategy, launched four years ago, as “our comprehensive framework for tackling the causes and impacts of hate speech in line with international human rights standards.”

He said UN offices and teams around the world are confronting hate speech by implementing local action plans, based on this strategy. He also highlighted some of the effective actions that can be taken to counter hate speech in full respect of fundamental rights and freedoms.

“Education initiatives, positive speech campaigns, research to understand and address root causes, and efforts to promote inclusion and equal rights all have an important role,” he said, noting that religious, community and business leaders have a part to play in this respect.

Noting that hate speech is often aimed at vulnerable groups, reinforcing discrimination, stigma and marginalization, Secretary-General Guterres highlighted that minorities, women, refugees, migrants, and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity were frequent targets.

“Social media platforms can amplify and spread hate speech at lightning speed,” he said, warning that misguided and ambiguous responses to hate speech may also violate human rights by restricting freedom of speech and expression.

“They may even silence those best placed to counter hateful narratives: human rights defenders and journalists,” he cautioned, adding: “But we are far from powerless in the face of hate speech.”

Speaking after delivering the Secretary-General’s message, his Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide noted that the real-life impact of the spread of hate speech “is seen daily, from hate crimes, to discrimination, large scale violence, and in the most serious cases, genocide”.

“We cannot relent in our efforts to tackle this insidious threat,” said Special Adviser Nderitu, urging action that considers the impact of hate speech on those targeted and society more broadly from a prevention perspective.

“We also need to ensure that we address its root causes, by promoting inclusion, non-discrimination and protecting civil space,” said the Special Adviser.

In his opening remarks, the President of the UN General Assembly, Csaba Kőrösi noted that “hate speech is an attack on human dignity and one of the most toxic forms of misinformation”.

“We must address it because we know that hate speech leads to hate crimes,” he said.

Speaking at the event, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the UN, Omar Hilale, said this International Day was more than a celebration or completion, but “a real call to action to face this insidious scourge which undermines peace, stability and development, and undermines human dignity and human rights”.

Other speakers at the event included the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilization Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, the UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director for the Crisis Bureau, Asako Okai, the Assistant-Secretary-General for Africa in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs - Department of Peace Operations, Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, the Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia for the Department of Development Cooperation, Ms. Gwi Yeop Son, and the Chair of the Project Aladdin, Ms. Leah Pizar.

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.

Today’s event was the main highlight of activities to mark the day, which have been ongoing since the start of June and will continue into July. Other activities include the launch, on the 12th of June, of the *Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes* (also known as ***The Napoli Women in Communities Plan of Action***).

An online campaign in partnership with the cartoon characters Smurfs is also ongoing, showing the impact of hate speech and ways to counter it.

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