

HATE SPEECH: A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Panel 1 of the “Decoding Hate Speech” series, a MIGS-GAAMAC collaboration

1 September 2020 09.00 am EST / 15.00 CET - Online

Concept Note

BACKGROUND

History has shown that hate speech and hate crimes often precede the commission of serious human rights violations and atrocities. In recent years, hate-fuelled rhetoric in public discourse and in the media have been on the rise around the world. By revolutionizing the way we communicate and interact, the Internet and social media have also considerably amplified this phenomenon.

Online hate speech has had a significant impact in the offline world: inflammatory speech online has contributed to ethnic cleansing and mob violence in places such as [Myanmar](#) and Sri Lanka; hate speech escalated to [violence against Europe’s Roma](#) during the global pandemic; ISIS weaponized social media to radicalize people all over the globe; and racist speech by white supremacists in the U.S. led to [real violence in Charleston](#), to name a few.

National and international responses to this global phenomenon have been uneven. One of the major issues lies in the definitions of hate speech and freedom of speech themselves. While freedom of speech is protected in many countries and in international treaties, definitions vary and there is no international legal definition of hate speech.

Some governments are hesitant to regulate freedom of speech while [governments with authoritarian tendencies](#) have imposed social media rules to crack down on activists and journalists. Big Tech Companies, meanwhile, have failed to [address online hate speech](#). Although some steps have been made, they remain opaque and inconsistent.

Alarmed by the increase of hate speech around the globe, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres launched [the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) in 2019, which proposes a holistic approach to identify, address and counter hate speech. However, progress has been slow, despite rising calls for regulations and codes of conduct.

Countering hate speech is a major national and international policy challenge. How can states, civil society and the private sector develop a common understanding of both freedom of speech and hate speech? What are the lessons to be learned from the past? How can atrocity prevention actors contribute to countering online and offline hate and incitement to violence?

The first panel of the “Decoding Hate Speech” series will address the complexity of this phenomenon with an informed, nuanced and multi-partied approach to identify and counter hate speech as a potential factor conducive to human rights violations and atrocity crimes.

OBJECTIVES

The high-level discussion will seek to:

- 1) Promote a common understanding of and raise awareness about the definition(s) and concept of hate speech
- 2) Provide a comprehensive overview of the historical background through examples of the use of hate speech
- 3) Highlight global and regional definitions, with a special focus on the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech
- 4) Inform the public about the risks of online hate speech and existing initiatives to counter it
- 5) Provide an online space for the atrocity prevention community to exchange ideas, approaches and experiences on the definitions and concepts of hate speech

FORMAT AND PANELLISTS

The event will take place online on **1 September from 09.00 am to 10.00 am EST** as a facilitated discussion of 30 to 45 minutes followed by a Q&A. Participants will be able to submit questions before the event via email and during the event via the live chat.

All stakeholders active or interested in atrocity prevention are invited to participate in this discussion including government, international organizations and civil society representatives.

Moderator and introductory remarks:

- Mô Bleeker, Special Envoy for Dealing with the Past and Atrocity Prevention at the Swiss Federal Department of Federal Affairs

Panellists:

- Representative of United Nations Office for Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
- Katarzyna Gardapkhadze, Officer in Charge, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire, Founder of the Child Soldiers Initiative and MIGS Distinguished Fellow

EXPECTED OUTCOME(S)

The results and conclusions from the discussion will feed into an overall report which will be shared during the GAAMAC IV global meeting taking place in November 2021.

Participants will be encouraged to continue the conversation online through GAAMAC's virtual platform.

ABOUT THE "DECODING HATE SPEECH" ONLINE SERIES

The Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) and Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC) are organizing a series of four high-level online conversations bringing together leading voices to discuss the linkages between hate speech, technology and atrocity prevention.

The series aims to increase the understanding of and raise awareness about online hate speech within the atrocity prevention community and beyond in the lead up to GAAMAC IV, a global meeting taking place in November 2021 which will address hate speech, incitement and discrimination.