



Foreword

Around the world, we are seeing a disturbing groundswell of xenophobia, racism and intolerance – including rising anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and persecution of Christians. Social media and other forms of communication are being exploited as platforms for bigotry. Neo-Nazi and white supremacy movements are on the march. Public discourse is being weaponized for political gain with incendiary rhetoric that stigmatizes and dehumanizes minorities, migrants, refugees, women and any so-called “other”.

This is not an isolated phenomenon or the loud voices of a few people on the fringe of society. Hate is moving into the mainstream – in liberal democracies and authoritarian systems alike. And with each broken norm, the pillars of our common humanity are weakened.

Hate speech is a menace to democratic values, social stability and peace. As a matter of principle, the United Nations must confront hate speech at every turn. Silence can signal indifference to bigotry and intolerance, even as a situation escalates and the vulnerable become victims.

Tackling hate speech is also crucial to deepen progress across the United Nations agenda by helping to prevent armed conflict, atrocity crimes and terrorism, end violence against women and other serious violations of human rights, and promote peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, which is prohibited under international law.

The United Nations has a long history of mobilizing the world against hatred of all kinds through wide-ranging action to defend human rights and advance the rule of law. Indeed, the very identity and establishment of the Organization are rooted in the nightmare that ensues when virulent hatred is left unopposed for too long.

Today, I fear, we have reached another acute moment in battling this demon, and so I have asked my Senior Advisers to explore what more we can do. This Strategy and Plan of Action is the result. It points to concrete ways in which the United Nations can play its part in addressing hate speech around the world while upholding freedom of opinion and expression, in collaboration with Governments, civil society, the private sector and other partners.

By enhancing global resilience against this insidious phenomenon, we can strengthen the bonds of society and build a better world for all.

**United Nations Secretary-General
António Guterres**

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What is hate speech?

There is no international legal definition of hate speech, and the characterization of what is 'hateful' is controversial and disputed. In the context of this document, the term hate speech is understood as **any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.** This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be demeaning and divisive.

Rather than prohibiting hate speech as such, international law prohibits the incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence (referred to here as 'incitement'). Incitement is a very dangerous form of speech, because it explicitly and deliberately aims at triggering discrimination, hostility and violence, which may also lead to or include terrorism or atrocity crimes. Hate speech that does not reach the threshold of incitement is not something that international law requires States to prohibit. It is important to underline that even when not prohibited, hate speech may be harmful.

The impact of hate speech cuts across numerous existing United Nations areas of operations, including: human rights protection; prevention of atrocity crime; preventing and countering terrorism and the underlying spread of violent extremism and counter-terrorism; preventing and addressing gender-based violence; enhancing protection of civilians; refugee protection; the fight against all forms of racism and discrimination; protection of minorities; sustaining peace; and engaging women, children and youth. Addressing hate speech, therefore, requires a coordinated response that tackles the root causes and drivers of hate speech, as well as its impact on victims and societies more broadly.

Strategic vision

The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech aims to give to the United Nations the room and the resources to address hate speech, which poses a threat to United Nations principles, values and programmes. Measures taken will be in line with international human rights norms and standards, in particular the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The objectives are twofold:

- ▶ Enhance UN efforts to address root causes and drivers of hate speech
- ▶ Enable effective UN responses to the impact of hate speech on societies



In order to address hate speech, the UN will implement actions at global and country level, as well as enhance internal cooperation among relevant UN entities.

The Strategy will be guided by the following principles:

1. The strategy and its implementation to be in line with the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The UN supports more speech, not less, as the key means to address hate speech;
2. Tackling hate speech is the responsibility of all – governments, societies, the private sector, starting with individual women and men. All are responsible, all must act;
3. In the digital age, the UN should support a new generation of digital citizens, empowered to recognize, reject and stand up to hate speech;
4. We need to know more to act effectively – this calls for coordinated data collection and research, including on the root causes, drivers and conditions conducive to hate speech.

Key commitments

Monitoring and analyzing hate speech	Relevant UN entities should be able to recognize, monitor, collect data and analyze hate speech trends.
Addressing root causes, drivers and actors of hate speech	The UN system should adopt a common understanding of the root causes and drivers of hate speech in order to take relevant action to best address and/or mitigate its impact. Relevant UN entities should also identify and support actors who challenge hate speech.
Engaging and supporting the victims of hate speech	UN entities should show solidarity with the victims of hate speech and implement human rights-centred measures which aim at countering retaliatory hate speech and escalation of violence. They should also promote measures to ensure that the rights of victims are upheld, and their needs addressed, including through advocacy for remedies, access to justice and psychological counselling.



Convening relevant actors

When relevant to the context, the UN should support convening of key actors; reframe problems in ways that make solutions more attainable; introduce independent mediation and expertise; and build coalitions.

Engaging with new and traditional media

The UN system should establish and strengthen partnerships with new and traditional media to address hate speech narratives and promote the values of tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism, and freedom of opinion and expression.

Using technology

UN entities should keep up with technological innovation and encourage more research on the relationship between the misuse of the Internet and social media for spreading hate speech and the factors that drive individuals towards violence. UN entities should also engage private sector actors, including social media companies, on steps they can take to support UN principles and action to address and counter hate speech, encouraging partnerships between government, industry and civil society.

Using education as a tool for addressing and countering hate speech

UN entities should take action in formal and informal education to implement SDG4, promote the values and skills of Global Citizenship Education, and enhance Media and Information Literacy.

Fostering peaceful, inclusive and just societies to address the root causes and drivers of hate speech

The UN System should raise awareness about respect for human rights, non-discrimination, tolerance and understanding of other cultures and religions, as well as gender equality, including in the digital world. It should promote intercultural, interfaith and intrareligious dialogue and mutual understanding.



Engaging in advocacy	The UN should use advocacy, both private and public, to highlight hate speech trends of concern as well as to express sympathy and support to targeted individuals or groups.
Developing guidance for external communications	Communications should be strategically used to address, counter and mitigate the impact of hate speech, as well as counteract its bearing, without restricting the right to freedom of expression.
Leveraging partnerships	The UN should establish / strengthen partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including those working in the tech industry. Most of the meaningful action against hate speech will not be taken by the UN alone, but by governments, regional and multilateral organizations, private companies, media, religious and other civil society actors.
Building the skills of UN staff	UN staff's skills at leadership and working level to understand and address hate speech should be enhanced across relevant UN entities, including via existing programmes.
Supporting Member States	Upon request, the UN should provide support to Member States in the field of capacity building and policy development to address hate speech. In this context, the United Nations will convene an international conference on Education for Prevention with focus on addressing and countering Hate Speech which would involve Ministers of Education.