The devastating effect of hatred is sadly nothing new. However, its scale and impact are now amplified by new communications technologies. Hate speech – including online – has become one of the most common ways of spreading divisive rhetoric on a global scale, threatening peace around the world.

HATE SPEECH, MIS- AND DISINFORMATION

While there are no universally accepted definitions of hate speech mis- and disinformation, UN entities have developed working definitions.

Hate speech, according to the working definition in the <u>United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech</u>, is "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".

The difference between mis- and disinformation lies with intent. Disinformation is information that is not only inaccurate, but is also intended to deceive and is spread in order to inflict harm. Misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of inaccurate information shared in good faith by those unaware that they are passing on falsehoods. Misinformation can be rooted in disinformation as deliberate lies and misleading narratives are weaponized over time, fed into the public discourse and passed on unwittingly.

In practice, the distinction between mis- and disinformation can be difficult to determine.

Mis- and disinformation and hate speech are related but distinct phenomena, with certain areas of overlap and difference in how they can be identified, mitigated and addressed. All three pollute the information ecosystem and threaten human progress.

> **"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."**
>
> United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres

HATE SPEECH AND REAL HARM

In recent years, the world has witnessed several mass atrocities. In many of these cases, hate speech was identified as a "precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide". While the use of social media and digital platforms to spread hatred is relatively recent, the weaponization of public discourse for political gain is unfortunately not new. As history continues to show, hate speech coupled with disinformation can lead to stigmatization, discrimination and large-scale violence.

WHY TACKLE HATE SPEECH?

Addressing and countering hate speech is, therefore, a necessity. It requires a holistic approach, mobilizing society as a whole. All individuals and organizations – including governments, the private sector, media, Internet corporations, faith leaders, educators, youth and civil society – have a moral duty to speak out firmly against hate speech and a crucial role to play in countering this scourge.

Importantly, combating hate speech first requires monitoring and analysing it to fully understand its dynamics. Since the spread of hateful rhethoric can be an early warning of violence – including atrocity crimes – limiting hate speech could contribute to mitigating its impact. The authors of hate speech should also be held accountable, to end impunity. Monitoring and analyzing hate speech is a priority for many UN entities, including UNESCO - the United Nations' specialized agency for education, science and culture - which supports and undertakes research, which supports research to better understand its dynamics

HOW TO DEAL WITH HATE SPEECH

Hate speech occurs in all societies, whether offline or online. It can sometimes be hard to assess when a comment is meant as hate speech – especially when expressed in the virtual world. It can also feel overwhelming to try to deal with obviously hateful content. However, there are many ways you can take a stand, even if you are not personally the victim of hate speech. And you can make a difference. The following tips may be helpful.

PAUSE
Refrain from making any hateful comments yourself and/or relaying such content. Whether online or offline, we should all act responsibly to stop the spread of hate and misinformation.

FACT-CHECK
To detect false and biased information, including hate speech propaganda, be sure to check the content's origin with the help of search engines, fact-checking tools and other reliable sources.

EDUCATE
You can help raise awareness of hate speech -- online or offline – simply by engaging with your family and friends in conversations about how hateful content can harm societies.

CHALLENGE
You can undermine hateful content with positive messages that spread tolerance, equality and truth in defense of those being targeted by hate.

SUPPORT
Taking a public stand for, and extending solidarity to, people who are the targets of hate speech demonstrates that rejecting hate is the responsibility of every individual.

REPORT
Most online platforms and communities have rules to keep user discussions respectful and will let you easily report hate messages to administrators or moderators.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

As the world's only truly universal global organization, the United Nations is the foremost forum to address issues that transcend national boundaries and cannot be resolved by any one country acting alone.

World history has shown us many times how hate rhetoric threatens democratic values, tolerance and social stability, and can lead to human tragedies, including genocide.

Hate speech and its consequences goes against fundamental UN values. It also undermines the UN Charter's core principles and objectives, such as respect for human dignity, equality and peace. As advancing human rights and fighting hate are at the heart of the UN's mission, the Organization has a duty to confront the global scourge of hate speech.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

In July 2021, the UN General Assembly highlighted global concerns over "the exponential spread and proliferation of hate speech" around the world and adopted a resolution on "promoting inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech".

The resolution recognizes the need to counter discrimination, xenophobia and hate speech and calls on all relevant actors, including States, to increase their efforts to address this phenomenon, in line with international human rights law.
The resolution proclaimed 18 June as the **International Day for Countering Hate Speech,** which was marked for the first time in 2022.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech