



7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
Baku, Azerbaijan, 25-27 April, 2016

Breakout Session “#SpreadNoHate: Sharing Good Practices on Preventing and Countering Hate Speech”

Background

More than three billion people today connect to the Internet globally, and almost 68% of them are active on social networks, representing 28% of the world population¹. In the United States alone, almost three-quarters of adults use social networking sites, and more than half of Facebook and Twitter users get their news through those sites². With the number of users constantly growing, social networks have become a target for the spread of hate speech and extremist propaganda. Never before in history have people been able to propagate incendiary speech in such effective way.

At the same time, news organizations have had to publish content as quickly as possible, often with less editorial oversight and fact checking, which results in more generalization, dehumanizing language, and the mixing of facts and opinions. As history has shown, rhetorical excesses can give rise to a climate of prejudice, discrimination and violence.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) launched on 2 December 2015 a campaign against hate speech in the media (traditional media, online media and social media), with senior officials calling for a global mobilization of citizens as foot soldiers in the battle against hate speech. The launch consisted of a one-day symposium at the United Nations Headquarters in New York with various speakers who examined the different measures taken globally to counter hate speech and cyberterrorism, and discussed their limitations.

The breakout session on Hate Speech during the 7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Baku, Azerbaijan, will be an opportunity to:

1. Present suggested **recommendations to counter hate speech and cyberterrorism**, as articulated during the New York Symposium
2. Continue an ongoing **dialogue on hate speech in the media** in a different part of the world, with a new set of media practitioners and professionals, as well as new perspectives, opinions, and good practices on how to counter hate speech and cyberterrorism.

The breakout session will not be limited to the physical walls of the forum venue: people will be invited to join the conversation online, using the UNAOC hashtag #SpreadNoHate, which has already been at the center of global online debates among millions of individuals since November 2015 (more than 7 million people on 2 December 2015 alone).

¹ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations agency specialized in information and communication technologies: https://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/press_releases/2015/17.aspx

² Pew Research Center, Social Networking Fact Sheet: <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet/>

The goals of this breakout session are to:

- Discuss ways to counter hate speech and help prevent Violent Extremism, in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's recent Plan of Action³
- Provide the public with a more complete and nuanced understanding of hate speech
- Contribute to a richer public debate and better media coverage of sensitive issues related to minorities globally
- Promote freedom of opinion and expression, pluralism, and diversity of the media
- Develop stronger media codes of conduct that foster tolerance and respect.

Points of Discussion

- What are the underlying reasons behind the surge in hate speech and cyberextremism incidents? What are avenues to address that phenomenon?
- What mechanisms are in place to combat hate speech in the media? To what extent can authorities monitor it without restricting freedom of expression and denying the right to privacy?
- In view of the Islamic State's successful use of the Internet to nurture terrorists, should governments have the right to block messages that facilitate violent acts? Should IT companies crack down on dangerous propaganda? Can that be fully effective?
- Where can the line be drawn between censoring hate speech and shutting down political debate? How not to fall into prohibition against dissenting viewpoints?
- As part of the global counter-terrorism effort, how important is the combat against hate speech and cyberterrorism?

³ Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism Report of the Secretary-General, 24 December 2015: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/456/22/PDF/N1545622.pdf?OpenElement>