



## OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE 4<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR OF THE OIC INDEPENDENT PERMANENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

### RABAT DECLARATION ON “ROLE OF MEDIA IN COMBATting HATE SPEECH”

RABAT, 23-24 OCTOBER 2017

OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), in partnership with the State Ministry of Human Rights in Morocco, and in collaboration with Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) held its Annual Seminar on the subject of “Role of Media in Combatting Hate Speech” in Rabat on 23-24 October 2017. Besides Commission Members, the event brought together experts from organizations such as the UNESCO, ISESCO, OHCHR as well as from OIC Member and Observer States including their NHRIs.

After going through an in-depth and inclusive discussion among participants, the Commission concluded with the following as the salient outcome of the Seminar:

**Affirmed** that Islam guarantees freedom of expression and recognizes the role of critical thinking. However, it makes a distinction between criticism or constructive discussion and sheer disrespect, insult and stereotyping that lead to incitement to hatred and discrimination.

**Acknowledged** that freedom of expression is a key human right, which is vital for development of stable, peaceful and progressive democratic societies. However, hate speech does the opposite. It dehumanizes individuals and communities on the basis of stereotypes /misperceptions relating in most cases to their race, ethnicity, origin or religion.

**Recalled** that the Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) clearly stipulate the importance, scope and bounds of the right to freedom of expression including expressions that need to be prohibited by law. This affirms the principle stated in Article 29 of UDHR, which provides that the exercise of all rights and freedoms is subject to limitations set by law that include purposes such as recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others. Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and corresponding General Comment No. XV also dwell on the importance of combating and proscribing hate speech.

**Further recalled** the important contributions made by UN Human Rights Council *Resolution 16/18 and Rabat Plan of Action* in promoting the values of freedom of expression and steps needed to evaluate and combat incitement to hatred, discrimination and violence resulting from negative stereotyping, xenophobia, stigmatization and hate speech.

**Highlighted** that the hate speech motivated by racism, xenophobia and intolerance, coupled with impunity for perpetrators creates a climate of fear and social exclusion of the targeted persons and groups, which is anathema to the ideals of pluralism and democracy. Hence, the need for responsible use of freedom of expression to ensure protection of the rights of others, in line with the parameters set forth in Articles 19 and 20 of ICCPR.

**Expressed deep concern** that, hate speech has become an epidemic and a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of multiculturalism in modern societies. Growing incidents of Islamophobia across the world are clear manifestations of incitement to hatred and discrimination. Refugees and migrants, in particular, bear the worst of incitement to hatred and stereotyping.

**Recognized** that the rapid development of mass and social media and communications technology has exponentially enlarged access to all sorts of information, resulting in a struggle to regulate or reprocess the content by State and non-State actors. Public opinion on a variety of important subjects across the world is largely shaped by the way these subjects are portrayed on mass media, internet and social networks. Words and expressions used have consequences as rhetorical excesses can give rise to a climate of prejudice, discrimination and violence.

**Acknowledged** the strength of media especially the new social media networks in quickly disseminating views and forming opinions as well as its misuse by terrorist and extremist groups for fomenting hatred and intolerance as well as new recruitment in their ranks. Hence, the need to effectively use the strength of media in promoting freedom of expression and combatting hate speech cannot be over emphasized.

**Stressed** that the crucial role of media in combatting hate speech should prioritize advocating respect for human rights, preventing hatred, discrimination, inequality and violence while building trust and promoting reconciliation. The media must work to counter hate speech and discrimination in all media frameworks, both on and offline, by promoting ethical standards, while maintaining respect for freedom of expression.

**Further** stressed that all media stakeholders must work to reduce the stimulus that incite hate speech and play a positive role in the overall promotion of mutual respect and understanding by taking strong positions against all instances of hate speech.

**Reaffirmed** the principles of the Rabat Plan of Action especially the responsibility of the media to ensure that acts of incitement to hatred are spoken out against and acted upon with the appropriate measures in accordance with international human rights law. **Also reaffirmed** the principles of the Fez Declaration on the role of religious leaders in combating incitement including through the use of the media. Furthermore, States should have in place a public policy and regulatory framework which promotes pluralism and diversity of the media, including new media; which promotes universality and non-discrimination in access to and use of means of communication.

**Urged** all States to: (i) dedicate necessary human and material resources to reduce the digital divide between the developing and developed countries; (ii) encourage the media to develop codes of conduct so as to effectively counter the hate speech; (iii) develop comprehensive strategies to make freedom of expression and the right to information primary weapons against those who violate, or seek to violate, basic human rights through their exploitation of those same freedoms; (iv) take firm actions to prevent the use of religion in their media outlets for inciting

hatred, discrimination and violence against minorities and to improve/repeal relevant laws in conformity with their respective international human rights obligations; (iv) counter hate speech with positive messages of inclusivity through media pluralism by allowing racial, religious and ethnic minorities to freely access media and information technologies for presenting their view point; (v) create legal and social conditions for promotion of free media with self-regulatory accountability mechanisms in the form of best practices and guidelines to ensure implementation of ethical standards across all media platforms; (vi) create spaces for interreligious and intercultural dialogue as means to counter hate speech; and (vii) focus on interfaith and intercultural education in particular to the youth who are primary users of social media to develop critical thinking that helps in combating hate speech and ignorance about others as well as to support dialogue, diversity and living together.

**Encouraged** Member States to involve religious leaders, agencies, institutions and followers as well as civil society in combating hate speech, support and build their internal capacity to constructively engage to address the negative use of media and create spaces for interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a necessary step to countering hate speech through religious education and use of social and educational media.

**Urged** all Member States to use the laudable teachings and traditions of Islam to promote tolerance, moderation, respect for the dissent and diversity of opinions as well as rights of minorities as part of their education curricula in order to promote critical thinking, combat hate speech and to promote peaceful progressive and pluralistic societies.

**Called upon** the Media to: (i) abide by the standards of responsible and ethical journalism based on independent, accurate and fact based communications meeting the criteria of fairness and objectivity; (ii) avoid biased and unfounded reporting leading to stereotyping and incitement to hatred against specific individuals, groups, minorities and communities; and (iii) promote respect for socio-cultural and religious diversity for building and strengthening inclusive, peaceful and pluralistic societies.

**Further called upon** all media institutions to consider taking the following measures:

- All media agencies and concerned authorities should invest in providing resources to raise awareness about the impact of hate speech in their respective societies. Despite existing good journalism practices, additional training and resources for media professionals and media organizations should be expanded to strengthen ethics and self-regulation, and build capabilities on how to investigate, analyze and report on hate speech and hate crime;
- Media must not only educate others but also educate itself about different cultures, traditions and beliefs to bring down stereotypes within the media, which reinforce xenophobic attitudes;
- Promote education on media ethics with a special focus on the rights and responsibilities of journalists and their role in creating and promoting peaceful societies. Awareness must be raised on the political, social and cultural rights of individuals and groups, including freedom of speech and the corresponding responsibilities and social implications;

- All media stakeholders should consider countering the dissemination and impact of hateful messages both online and offline as part of their mission. They must be alert to the dangers of hate speech and the risk of manipulation;
- Journalists should play a crucial and constructive role in forming both policy and societal opinion regarding hate speech and its negative effects on society. Journalists must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify hate speech and to counteract hate speech messages;
- Media institutions should encourage conflict sensitive reporting and multicultural awareness to help dispel the ‘us’ against ‘them’ fallacy. Multicultural awareness campaigns should take into account the respect for the diversity of cultures and traditions.
- Encourage victims and witnesses to report hate speech related crimes to help end impunity against hate crimes. Impunity against hate crimes can be tackled by establishing monitoring and evaluation units in newsrooms. These units would then be tasked with monitoring hate speech trends, compiling reports and bringing these to the attention of key institutions and the civil society.
- Creation of Media Early Warning Mechanisms through use of modern information and communication technologies to note any increase in the hate speech, which could then be used to contain or prevent the violence.

**Called upon** States to politically commit at the highest level to strengthen international efforts to building a shared framework and mutual understanding to differentiate between freedom of expression and hate speech, in line with international human rights law.

**Further called upon** States to formulate a comprehensive information strategy in close cooperation and partnerships with relevant information centers and institutions to identify and counter the hate speech including by developing a code of conduct to monitor and address the hate content; receive and impart culturally sensitive professional training for unbiased reporting of the events; as well as to help modernize media infrastructure to identify hate contents and develop effective counter narratives to combat incitement to hatred and discrimination.

**Urged** the international community to intensify its efforts to help break the impasse in ongoing discussions about how to effectively combat hate speech at the UN and at the Istanbul Process, as well as to contribute positively to the effective implementation of the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 and the Rabat Plan of Action at all levels. States may consider establishing an Open-ended Working group within the Human Rights Council to discuss effective implementation of HRC Res 16/18 and to establish an observatory within OHCHR to monitor and report on incidence of hate speech and incitement to hatred including in the Media as an early warning mechanism.

**Encouraged** States to create and strengthen national mechanisms to combat hate speech in close cooperation with media, religious institutions and civil society and to report on their efforts to relevant UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies through periodic reports as well as during their Universal Periodic Review in the Human Rights Council.

**Appreciated** the notable role played by the Kingdom of Morocco in organizing and promoting activities that contribute to better understanding of the right to freedom of expression, its scope and limitations such as hate speech and tools available to combat it in accordance with international human rights law.

\*\*\*\*\*