



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

Fighting online hate speech and fake news in a global crisis

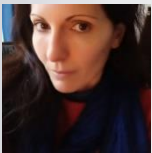
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* Moderators: **Mr Marc Limon** (Universal Rights Group) and **Prof. Jovan Kurbalija** (Diplo Foundation)



Dr Bahia Tahzib-Lie, *Human Rights Ambassador of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.*

In this climate of uncertainty, hate speech is used to stigmatize others and test our commitment to human rights. We can only tackle this challenge together, with the coordination and action of the UN. A strong coherent response is vital. It is important to teach young people the human rights norms, and that the hate speech is unacceptable. We can now reach to students and engage with them. Fighting misinformation and disinformation should rely on the voices of experts and the expert knowledge.



Simona Cruciani, *Political Affairs Officer at the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.*

The UN has developed a number of policies, including the *UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech*², the *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence*³, and the *Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites*⁴. While some religious leaders are spreading misinformation, others are sharing messages of tolerance. Influential religious, political or community leaders can play a very important role to address the misinformation and disinformation. Education is a very important issue that the UN is taking seriously. The UN is planning an **interministerial conference** on implementation of Plan of Action on Hate Speech focusing on prevention and combatting Hate Speech and that will include a Youth Forum.



Mona Rishmawi, *Chief of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).*

The Special Rapporteurs highlight a number of issues in their statements; they keep receiving communications and reacting to them – the OHCHR system is up and running.

There is no doubt that certain groups are more vulnerable than others (e.g. those in extreme poverty and exclusion). Physical distancing can be very difficult for certain communities (detainees, migrants, indigenous peoples). The people who are most affected are often the ones who are blamed.

Fake news can be almost criminal in the case of a global pandemic, as it can lead to killing people.

The question of the digital divide should also be addressed. In some societies not everyone has access to social media and internet. In general, it is often the elite that have access to reliable information.



Paige Morrow, *Senior Legal Officer at ARTICLE 19.*

There is a need to distinguish between the hate speech and misinformation. Responses to misinformation should be through non-legislative means, as one of fundamental points of democratic society is freedom of expression, Tech companies should lead the initiatives. For hate speech international human rights law provides guidance on hate speech that needs to be criminalised. A number of EU states (UK, Germany, France) have already passed laws to address hate speech. At times speech can be harmful but does not reach the legal threshold. In these cases it should be addressed by companies.



Dr Andrew Fagan, *Director of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex.*

We have a strong tendency to hear what we want to hear and already believe. This demonstrates a failure in education and critical thinking. When we overcome this pandemic, this lack of critical thinking will have to be addressed. As we speak laws are being passed criminalizing spread of false information. Free speech is not absolute but we must be cautious in restricting it. We are dependent on reliable expertise; politicians also need reliable and scientific advice.

¹ <https://righton.dig.watch/about/>

² <https://bit.ly/39Q1p41>

³ <https://bit.ly/2V973ck>

⁴ <https://bit.ly/39RKoqd>