

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

Countering Hate Speech at the Intersection of Religion and Gender: Challenges and Pathways Forward

Side event during the 59th Session of the Human Rights Council

Room XXVII, Palais des Nations, 17 June 2025, 2 - 3 PM

Co-organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (GCHRAGD), on the occasion of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech

Background and Context

Hate speech continues to be a global issue with far-reaching consequences. Its dehumanizing effects not only harm the targeted individuals but also fracture communities, leading to increased discrimination, violence, hate crimes and social fragmentation. Hate speech is spreading both offline and online, nourished by echo chambers of ignorance.

Religious intolerance, in particular, has been weaponized in ways that target religious or belief minorities, and women and girls often bear the brunt of this hatred. Whether through harmful stereotypes, physical violence, or the denial of rights, the intersections of religious hatred and gender-based violence are deeply concerning. The High Commissioner for Human Rights flagged that expressions of religious hatred against individuals wearing religious symbols often disproportionately target women and girls.

The UN's "Faith for Rights" framework emphasizes the need for inclusive peer-to-peer learning across religions and belief systems to foster peace and safeguard human rights. On the occasion of the *International Day for Countering Hate Speech*, proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 75/309, it is crucial to reflect on the role of religious engagement and gender equality in addressing this global issue.

This side event, co-organized by the OHCHR and the GCHRAGD, seeks to highlight the gendered dimensions of hate speech and explore concrete strategies to combat it. By focusing on the intersectionality of religion and gender, the event aims to strengthen efforts to address hate speech while ensuring that gender perspectives, particularly those of women and girls, remain at the forefront.

Key Objectives

Aligned with the "Faith for Rights" framework, this side event will provide a platform to:

- Highlight the disproportionate impact of hate speech on women and girls, especially those facing both gender-based and religiously motivated discrimination.
- Foster dialogue on effective responses to combat religious discrimination and violence against women within diverse cultural and religious contexts.
- Showcase best practices and initiatives to promote intercultural understanding, gender equality, and interfaith dialogue in the fight against hate speech.

Key Themes

- **The Gendered Impact of Hate Speech:** Exploring how women and girls, particularly from marginalized religious or belief communities, face heightened vulnerability to hate speech.
- **Religious Hatred and Gender-based Violence:** Discussing how religious intolerance intersects with gender-based violence, with a focus on the unique experiences of women and girls targeted by both forms of discrimination.
- **Promoting Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue:** Highlighting initiatives that foster understanding and tolerance between different religious and cultural groups, emphasizing women's roles in peacebuilding and dialogue.
- **Combating Online Hate Speech:** Addressing the amplification of religious and gender-based hate speech in the digital space and exploring strategies to create safer online environments, with a focus on women's leadership in countering online hate.
- **Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Discussing international frameworks and national policies to combat hate speech, with a focus on protecting women and girls from religious and gender-based discrimination.

Format

The side event during the 59th session of the Human Rights Council will feature a panel discussion followed by an interactive debate, allowing participants to engage directly with experts and practitioners. This dynamic format aims to foster meaningful dialogue and exchange on strategies to combat hate speech and promote human rights.

Moderators

Mr. Michael Wiener, OHCHR & **Dr. Umesh Palwankar**, Executive Director, Geneva Centre

Potential Speakers

- **H.E. Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann**, Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations Office in Geneva
- **Ms. Adriana Quiñones**, Head of Human Rights and Development and Deputy Director of UN Women Geneva Office
- **Dr. Saba Haddad**, Representative to the UN Baha'i International Community