



The Power of Words

The Role of Religion, Media and Policy in Countering Hate Speech

VIENNA, AUSTRIA. OCT 2019 REPORT



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in Countering Hate Speech

REPORT

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*“With the wonderful gift of language comes a responsibility
to use it wisely and for the common good”*

H.E. FAISAL BIN ABDULRAHMAN BIN MUAAMMAR,
KAICIID SECRETARY GENERAL



TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Conference	04
Participant Profiles	08
Plenaries	10
Challenges of Countering Hate Speech	12
Legal Frameworks	12
Education	12
Media	12
Governance	14
Perceptions Towards Vulnerable Groups	14
Politics	14
Global Practices	16
The Arab World	16
Europe	19
Other Countries	20
United Nations	20
Recommendations	22
Participant Feedback	25
Looking Forward	26

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE



ON OCTOBER 30 AND 31, 2019, THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE CENTRE (KAICIID) CONVENED IN VIENNA MORE THAN 190 FAITH LEADERS, POLICYMAKERS, STATE ACTORS, CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES, JOURNALISTS, EDUCATORS, AND DIALOGUE PRACTITIONERS TO DISCUSS WAYS OF PREVENTING AND COUNTERING THE GROWING GLOBAL PHENOMENON OF HATE SPEECH.

The international conference “The Power of Words: The Role of Religion, Media, and Policy in Countering Hate Speech” brought together leading representatives of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith communities to speak up and raise public awareness of the need to prevent and delegitimise hate speech, particularly against any group or community on the basis of their identity; share lessons learned from local, national, and international organizations and government agencies that have been active in countering hate speech; advocate for policymakers to take concrete actions against hate speech perpetrators; and encourage a better understanding of cultural implications of migration trends, particularly in Europe.

The conference represented a concrete response to the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, launched in May 2019. It was designed to tackle the topic of hate speech through the different aspects of religion, media, education, and policy.



High-level participants who spoke during the opening ceremony and panel discussions included the honourable former President of Austria Dr. Heinz Fisher; H.E. Ján Figel, the European Commission Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief Outside the European Union; H.E Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; H.E. Sheikh Dr. Shawki Ibrahim Allam, the Grand Mufti of Egypt; and H.E. Adama Dieng, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide.

The main outcome of the conference was the development of a plan of action on countering hate speech resulting from recommendations made by participants. The action plan has been endorsed by the **Interreligious Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Arab World**, which committed to implement its main recommendations through specific activities and advocacy efforts in that region.

The event was also an opportunity for KAICIID and the United Nations Office of Genocide Prevention

and the Responsibility to Protect to renew their commitment to work together on countering hate speech and involving religious leaders in efforts towards sustainable peace.

The two parties signed a new Memorandum of Understanding at the conference vowing to mutually support their efforts to promote peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. ■

The Interreligious Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Arab World, was founded in February 2018 and is the first interreligious dialogue platform in the region. The platform aims to strengthen the relationship between religious leaders, institutions and policymakers at the national, regional and international levels.

The Power of Words

The Role of Religion, Media and Policy in Countering Hate Speech

Hate Speech
October 30-31 2019
Vienna, Austria

network: CounteringHateSpeech
password: KAICIID2019

KAICIID
DIALOGUE
CENTRE

"If a word can have such an impact and such relevance, we can imagine what damage hate speech can bring to a human being, to a community, to society, and to the principle of peaceful dialogue and respectful cooperation."

DR. HEINZ FISCHER,
THE HONOURABLE
FORMER PRESIDENT OF AUSTRIA

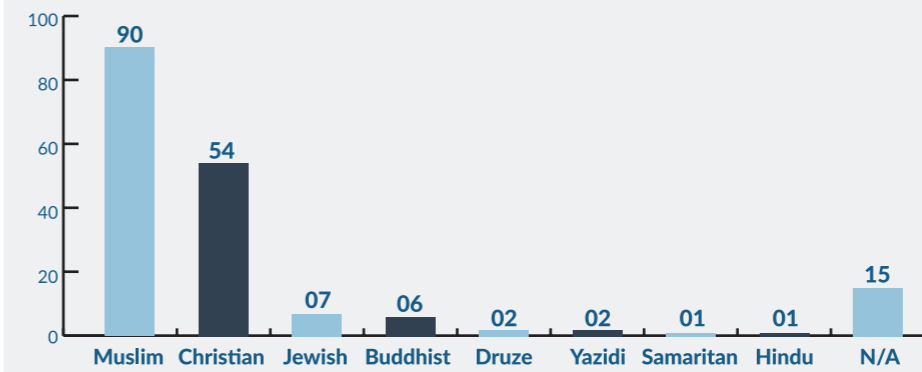


PARTICIPANT PROFILES



RELIGION:

Participants represented diverse religions from all around the world.



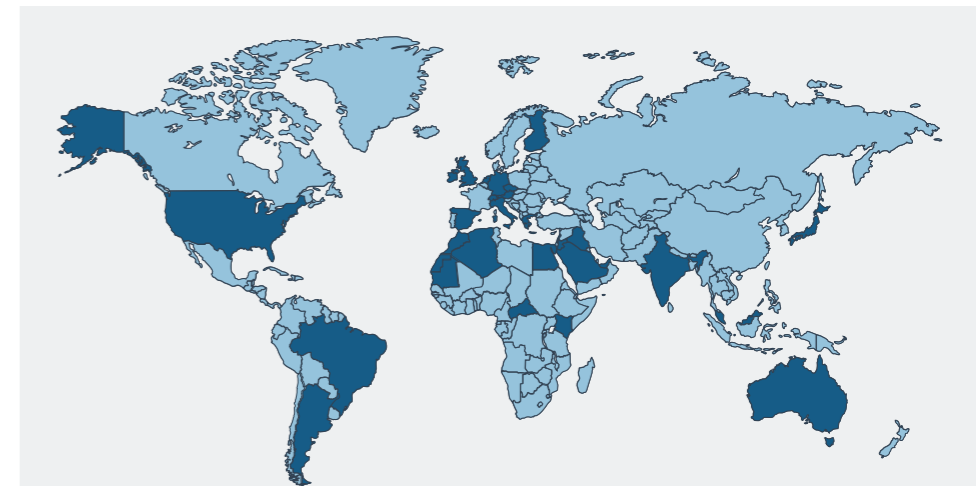
GENDER:

177 participants attended the hate speech conference from all over the world. 33 females (19%) and 144 males (81%).

GEOGRAPHY:

190 participants came from 40 countries (88 from the Arab region, 58 from Europe, and 31 from the rest of the world).

Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brazil, Central Africa Republic, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Myanmar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Switzerland, Syria, the Netherlands, Tunisia, UAE, UK, Ukraine and USA.



THE CONFERENCE HAD FIVE PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND THREE WORKING GROUPS THAT ADDRESSED DIFFERENT AREAS AND TOPICS AROUND COUNTERING HATE SPEECH (RELIGION, MEDIA, POLICY, AND EDUCATION).



**Panel Discussion I:
Strategies & Perspectives of
Religious Leaders in Counter-
ing Hate Speech.**

The panel emphasised the need for more coordination, cooperation, and joint efforts among religious leaders in countering hate speech on a national, regional and global level.



**Panel Discussion II:
The Role of State Actors &
Policymakers in Countering
Hate Speech.**

The discussion focused on the crucial role political culture has in the prevention of hate speech and urged State actors and policymakers to develop a culture of human dignity, solidarity, and living together amidst diversity.



**Panel Discussion III:
The Role of Religious Institu-
tions & Faith-Based Organi-
zations in Countering Hate
Speech.**

The panel captured the role religious leaders and faith-based organizations can play in countering hate speech and stopping the misuse of religion to discriminate against others and/or legitimise violence.



**Panel Discussion IV:
Responsibility of Media in
Countering Hate Speech.**

Participants agreed during this panel discussion that preventing hate speech is a shared responsibility that lies not only with the media but with society at large.



**Panel Discussion V:
Interreligious Education in
Countering Hate Speech.**

Panellists concluded that education is the optimal tool to convey messages about dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect for diversity. The panellists identified several best practices from different countries including Ukraine, Spain, and Saudi Arabia. ■

CHALLENGES OF COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

/ LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Conference participants identified the lack of comprehensive laws and hate crime legislation around the world as challenging and cross-cutting factors across all discussions. This gap often prevents victims from reporting hate crimes to law enforcement authorities, which can result in injustices in modern societies. Different regions, including the Arab region need constitutional provisions and legal procedures to tackle and counter hate speech and to maintain universal human rights standards within their countries, as well as to engage international institutions in countering hate speech.

/ EDUCATION

Conference participants emphasised the need to review how school curricula address inter-religious and intercultural diversity. They also recommended investing more in educational programmes that target adults along with those already designed for young people.

On a different level, an essential challenge in promoting inter-religious education to counter hate speech exists in providing fair and affordable access to education. This challenge exists in regions where education is still a privilege for many people, particularly vulnerable groups including women and refugees. The bottom line is that change-making is a very long and difficult process that requires changing programmes as well as training teachers.

More specifically, religious leaders highlighted problematic language used in certain hymns in relation to other Christians, as well as to other communities. They stressed the need to re-examine such language, not only within the Church, but also within educational institutions.

/ MEDIA

Participants agreed that traditional and social media platforms should become more positive spaces that promote tolerance and diversity rather than hate and conflict. Digital technology has enabled the media to reach audiences never before reached and has given rise to unreliable “citizen journalists” who use social media to influence others’ opinions and perceptions. The misuse of traditional and social media constitutes a huge factor in spreading hate speech. Sometimes audiences want editors and journalists to spread negative messages.

Because some media outlets disseminate illiberal views on issues related to faith, religious leaders should learn online strategies to spread messages about tackling hate speech from religious perspectives. In parts of the Arab region, some religious leaders incite hate speech and are thus part of the problem. The media has also played a direct role in inciting hatred between candidates during elections in many parts of the world. In addition, politicians have used media to incite hate speech against refugees to divert the public’s attention from the root causes of economic difficulties.



«Changemaking is a very long and difficult process that requires changing programmes as well as training teachers»

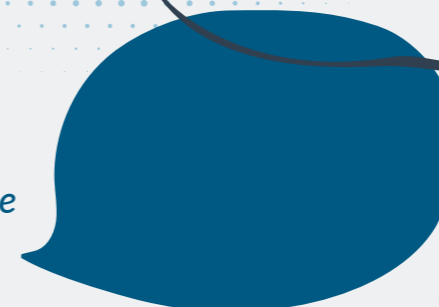
«There is a lack of comprehensive laws and hate crime legislation around the world»



«Traditional and social media platforms should become more positive spaces that promote tolerance and diversity rather than hate and conflict»



«We need to improve perceptions towards minorities and figure out how best to advocate greater support for victims of hate crimes»



«Future generations should be empowered to become socially responsible global citizens»



«Political leaders and policymakers are the most responsible for spreading hate speech»

/ GOVERNANCE

Policymakers admitted that a lack of political and administrative capacities prevent some countries from being properly governed in accordance with democratic principles and the rule of law. These knowledge and capacity gaps present a major challenge to empowering future generations to become socially responsible global citizens who possess sound moral and ethical compasses and are prepared to tackle global challenges including hate speech.

/ PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS VULNERABLE GROUPS

The stereotyping of vulnerable groups, including women, refugees, and ethnic and religious minorities, is one of the main drivers of hate speech and incitement to violence. Religious leaders, policymakers, educators, faith-based organizations, and media experts discussed different ways to improve perceptions towards minorities and how best to advocate greater support for victims of hate crimes. Religious leaders find it important yet challenging to contribute to reducing fears and empowering religious minorities to stay in their home countries rather than leaving. This becomes even more important when the physical survival of a group is at stake, as has been true for the Yazidis. In conflict-stricken areas, social cohesion often erodes, leading to increased hate speech targeting internally displaced persons. The same applies in host countries where refugees face discrimination, intolerance, and hate speech.

/ POLITICS

At times, political leaders and policymakers have been responsible for spreading hate speech in order to make short-term political gains. Political leaders have a duty to uphold the rights of their citizens and ensure inclusive policies. Hate speech in the political arena which is based on factors such as religion or ethnicity disrupts social cohesion and threatens the fabric of society. It also presents huge challenges for faith-based organizations who are working to promote peace-building or social cohesion, particularly within interreligious communities. ■



«Religious leaders find it important yet challenging to contribute to reducing fears and empowering religious minorities to stay in their home countries rather than leaving»

GLOBAL PRACTICES IN COUNTERING HATE SPEECH



THE ARAB REGION

In Saudi Arabia, the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue reached out to 4 million female and male students from across the country and taught them dialogue principles.

In Bahrain, the Constitution protects religious diversity and freedom. Other examples of countering hate speech include the establishment of a centre for global coexistence and the observance of the International Day of Conscience.

In Iraq, the highest religious council established an anti-hate speech campaign and disseminated its message among schools and international organizations for adoption and use. To this end, a booklet that captures diversity in Iraq has been initiated and Muslim leaders have visited their Christian counterparts.

In Syria, the community-led initiative «Towards a Country Immune to Hatred» was commissioned in the Valley of Christians (Wadi al-Nasara), a predominantly Christian area of Homs that has received a large number of displaced people during the Syrian conflict. The initiative managed to bring together Sunnis, Alawites, and people from other religions in the area to participate



in cultural and dialogue events. This initiative forms a space to exchange ideas, opinions, and actions to counter hate speech among communities.

In Egypt, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services established the Forum for Intercultural Dialogue Organization. The Forum encourages citizens to work together to achieve common goals regardless of gender, religion, or beliefs. Since its establishment in 1992, the Forum has worked to contribute to the values of citizenship, coexistence, and building a pluralistic society that respects diversity and difference within a fair, legal and constitutional framework.

In Kurdistan Iraq, a Directorate of Religious Coexistence and Components in the Ministry of Endowment (Awqaf) and Religious Affairs was established in 2015. Since its establishment, this directorate has gathered representatives of different religions in Kurdistan. In addition to this directorate, the ministry has had a General Directorate of Christians and General Directorate of Yazidis since 1993.

Additionally, the Kurdistan Institute for the Capacity Development of Preachers was launched, and the Iraqi education system's curricula were amended to promote diversity and inclusiveness.



/ EUROPE

Religious leaders consider small steps that bring together people from different religions as successful experiences that can yield best practices. Such gatherings are either social occasions and celebrations or activities that review relevant hate speech legislation (as seen in the Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network action plan).

The European Commission and information technology companies agreed to a code of conduct to counter hate speech online in May 2016 (80% of notifications were reviewed within one day and content removal reached 70%)

The Council of Europe states in its 2003 Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cyber-crime that party states are committed to introducing domestic law penalties for criminal offences that include distributing racist and xenophobic material via the internet; threatening or publicly insulting persons based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin, as well as religion, via the Internet; and distributing material which denies, grossly minimises, approves, or justifies acts constituting genocide or crimes against humanity.

In the UK, freedom of expression vs. protection against hate speech debates continue. In 1986, the UK passed legislation to combat hate speech, and the Racial and Religious Hatred Act came into force in 2007.

In Spain, a campaign against Islamophobia has been launched to discourage online and offline stereotyping and stigmatisation. The campaign is based on the idea that all actors play key roles in countering terrorism and Islamophobia.

In Germany, since February 2016, new media producers have been coordinating the Council of Europe's No Hate Speech Movement. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is promoting the campaign's integration into the country's Living Democracy programme.

The National Campaign Committee accompanies and advises the No Hate Speech Movement and has brought together a broad alliance from civil society, political and management sectors.

In Ukraine, amidst internal conflict, religious leaders have played a great role in welcoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and participating in the award-winning School of Interreligious Dialogue project.



/ OTHER COUNTRIES

In Bangladesh, interreligious dialogue has been used as a tool in an award-winning project to build inclusive narratives about “the Other”.

In Nigeria, peace clubs have been established in the country’s secondary schools.

/ UNITED NATIONS

In 2017, the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect launched the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes. This plan is the first-ever action plan designed specifically to enable religious leaders to prevent incitement to violence. It was developed over two years of intensive global and regional consultations organized by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, with support from KAICIID, the World Council of Churches, and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. A total of 232 religious leaders and actors from 77 countries took part in the consultations. Participants included Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs from different groups and denominations, as well as representatives of various religious minorities, including the Baha’i, Candomblé, Kakai, and Yazidi.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) coordinated the 28th session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), which took place in Vienna in May 2019. As the main agency of the UN system addressing crime prevention and criminal justice issues, the

CCPCJ plays a critical role in advancing collective efforts against national and transnational crime while strengthening fair and effective criminal justice institutions. UNODC became a member of the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development in 2019. The Task Force provides policy guidance for engaging with faith-based actors and deepens UN system staff capacities around intersections of religion with the UN pillars of development, human rights, peace, and security dynamics.

UNODC also welcomed the UN Multi-Faith Advisory Council (AC), comprised of leaders from the UN’s top global faith partners, to the Interagency Task Force. ■



RECOMMENDATIONS

THE CONFERENCE PLENARIES AND WORKING GROUP SESSIONS RESULTED IN A SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS AND COUNTER HATE SPEECH. THESE RECOMMENDATIONS AIM TO INCREASE COLLABORATION AMONG DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS, ACTIVATE EXISTING NETWORKS AND AGREEMENTS, BUILD CAPACITIES OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS, AND ADVOCATE COUNTERING HATE SPEECH AT REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

IN ORDER TO PROMOTE COLLABORATION AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING, WE SHOULD:

- **Encourage religious leaders and media to partner** in countering hate speech;
- **Document and share best practices** including historical accounts of efforts and initiatives in countering hate speech;
- **Design programmes for youth** that promote common values, in collaboration with the UN system;
- **Establish an interfaith social media presence** to ensure religiously diverse role models;
- **Launch an award programme** to encourage organizations and individuals who work against hate speech.

BUILD CAPACITY FOR IDENTIFYING AND COUNTERING HATE SPEECH BY:

- **Training religious leaders and journalists** on responding to hate speech on social media;
- **Training young people and empowering them** to share positive messages and tackle hate speech on social media.

DIALOGUE PRACTITIONERS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD:

- **Advocate rules, regulations, and legal measures** that prevent discrimination against the OSCE's nine identified vulnerable groups and ensure equal citizenship for all, regardless of faith;
- **Reach out to decision-makers at the policy level and encourage policymakers to adopt relevant laws to counter hate speech** while ensuring the right balance between freedom of expression and hate speech;
- **Support governments** in producing guidelines for curricula on common citizenship values and ethics.

WE SHOULD CREATE KNOWLEDGE AND INCREASE CONNECTIVITY BY:

- **Researching, documenting, and monitoring** statistics on hate speech incidents;
- **Mapping existing initiatives** that counter hate speech at international and regional levels to maximise efforts and resources;
- **Developing a code of ethics for journalists and social media** to prevent/counter hate speech;
- **Implementing reflective learning practices** in formal and non-formal education;
- **Creating a platform and global institution** for exchanging ideas on moderation and dialogue and working together to define hate speech. ■

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

95% of participants were pleased and satisfied with conference outcomes and demonstrated better understanding of KAICIID's work. 71% of respondents confirmed that they are willing to work with KAICIID to implement the above recommendations, as well as any initiatives that foster dialogue and efforts to counter hate speech.

Participants indicated (with an average of 85%) that they were satisfied and pleased with the content and topics discussed during the conference, and that these discussions contributed to enhancing their knowledge.

More generally, the conference enhanced KAICIID's visibility as a convener (bringing together religious actors, policymakers, educators, and media experts) and emphasised its capacity to tackle global phenomena such as hate speech. ■



LOOKING FORWARD

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONFERENCE PROVIDE INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTNERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN FORCES AND WORK TOGETHER TO ADDRESS HATE SPEECH AND ITS NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PEACE AND SOCIAL COHESION THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

TO THIS END:

KACIID is investing nearly 1.5 million euros in 2020 towards the implementation of the recommendations and action plan resulting from this conference.

Through this commitment, KACIID aims to enhance the role of religious leaders, policymakers, and media outlets in countering hate speech and contributing to social cohesion at local and regional levels. This investment is also intended to further align KACIID's activities with the United Nations Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

KACIID's initiatives will be implemented in its focus countries and regions (comprised of the Arab Region, Central African Republic, Myanmar and Nigeria), as well as in Europe.

They will include:

- Social media campaigns against hate speech;
- Training stakeholders on how to counter hate speech, with a specific focus on vulnerable groups such as women and people seeking refuge;
- Supporting existing efforts and assisting in launching small-scale initiatives to counter hate speech at national and local levels;
- A tailored training programme for media experts, journalists, and social media influencers on the responsible use of their channels;
- Youth and women forums promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and countering hate speech.
- Gathering and presenting polling data to help inform and shape the Centre's programmes while at the same time improving its contribution to discussions at policy-making levels on hate speech. ■





“Words kill, and the power of words as listed by KAICIID should show that words can also make peace.”

H.E. ADAMA DIENG,
THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S SPECIAL ADVISER
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE





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