

Hate speech is not equal to free speech

The rise of online hate speech is a new alarming global phenomenon, which represents one of the biggest threats to democratic values, social stability and peace. As more and more people have started using internet, individuals inclined towards racism, misogyny or homophobia have found the easiest way to reinforce their views and even translate hate speech into violent actions. Almost every day, we witness how easily public discourse is being weaponized by certain people that stigmatizes and dehumanizes minorities, migrants, LGBT and any so-called “other”. Against this background, it is extremely important to raise awareness of the problem and debunk one of the biggest misconceptions that hate speech is equal to free speech.

Freedom of speech is a human right recognized and protected under international law. However, free speech is not an absolute and there is a need to balance it with other human rights. Hate speech is a contentious field with many competing definitions. According to INACH, “hate speech is intentional or unintentional public discriminatory and/or defamatory statements, intentional incitement to hatred and/or violence and/or segregation based on a person's or a groups' real or perceived race, ethnicity, language, nationality, colour etc.”

Hate speech normalizes prejudice, sowing seeds of fear, hatred and distrust therefore, it is inconsistent with the freedoms that are the birthright of all people. Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech, but it rather means standing up against discrimination and violence. In an increasingly polarized world, hate speech solutions require multi-stakeholder approach. Meaning that civil society, governments and technology companies need to work together in order to keep hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous.

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