

Sixth Annual Trygve Lie Symposium on Fundamental Freedoms

Combatting Hate Speech: Everyone's Responsibility

Concept Paper

Recent years have shown a steady increase in hate speech directed towards minorities and other vulnerable groups. Every day, serious instances of intolerance and discrimination affect different people, be it based on their actual or perceived nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion or disability.

When confronted with manifestations of hate, governments bear a responsibility to respond while at the same time upholding fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of opinion and expression. The state has an obligation to protect the rights of all its citizens, and its ability to do so is the ultimate test of our common democratic values. In addition, political leaders have a special duty to speak out against manifestations of hate and intolerance, as well as to refrain from making discriminatory statements themselves.

Traditional media actors must carefully guard against being used by purveyors of hate and intolerance. The advancement of communication technologies such as the Internet and social media have added a new dimension to the problem, providing individuals and organizations with modern and powerful means to disseminate hateful messages easily and widely, and shifting the editorial role from trained individuals to the population at large.

Civil society organizations are often at the forefront of combatting intolerance and discrimination in holding both governments and other key stakeholders accountable. It is therefore vital to take their experiences into account when adopting strategies to combat and prevent manifestations of hate.

Intended as a platform to discuss and provoke new ideas, the Symposium will invite policy-makers, government officials, as well as media and civil society representatives from a broad range of backgrounds. By addressing these important matters, the Symposium will complement and follow up on the conclusions from the International Conference on intolerance and hate crime against minorities, held in Oslo 14-15 May 2013.¹

Key Questions for Discussion:

- How can we combat hate speech while at the same time protecting the fundamental freedom of opinion and expression?
- How do media actors strike the balance between their responsibility to prevent the dissemination of intolerant and discriminatory attitudes and their editorial independence and integrity?
- To what extent is social media providers responsible for the prevention of discriminatory and intolerant discourse online?
- What role can other stakeholders play in this area, be it UN bodies, states, government officials, civil society actors or human rights defenders?

¹ See www.rehc2013.org for more information, including the Conference Report and Chair's Summary of Conclusions.