

Rights for Peace Oral Statement to be delivered at the 13th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues 2020

Rights for Peace welcomes the attention that the Forum and the Special Rapporteur is dedicating to the issue of 'hate speech', xenophobic rhetoric and incitement to hatred against minorities.

As a non-profit working to prevent mass atrocities in fragile states, we see the prevalence of hate speech and racist propaganda as a marker of escalating human rights violations. As put by Sheri Rosenberg, "The Holocaust did not start with the gas chambers. It started with hate speech."

Hate speech is an important indicator of bias intent. In order to prevent and punish the steps that lead to genocide, we believe it is important to connect hateful intent with wider violations.

The theme of this Forum could not be more timely. The Black Lives Matter movement has shown us that negative portrayal and persecution of minority groups is easily exacerbated by extremist ideology about identity and superiority. Hate speech against minorities on social media is a disturbing amplification of discrimination and incitement that has become increasingly normalised offline.

Rights for Peace works with partners on the ground undertaking training, monitoring, and reporting on hate-based violations. In our recent work, we have found two key challenges:

1. There is a widespread need to increase understanding of prejudice and identity to build local resilience to bias, and reinforce the capacities of those who are able to speak out;
2. There is a need to hold publicly to account those who incite discrimination, hostility and violence.

At the same time, there is underinvestment in prevention work, and frontline activism. We believe that synergies with bottom-up, grassroots approaches are key and that this Forum should recommend that:

1. Human rights reporting to and by treaty bodies and special mandates should seek to link hateful intent with other violations in order to provide a clearer picture of systemic identity-based violence;
2. The importance of front-line organisations working to counter hate speech should be further recognised, also with dedicated investment.