

Foreword

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minority issues

Unfortunately, no country or society is completely free from hatred and it is often minorities who are the targets of that hate. But what are the causes of that hatred and how does it evolve from a thought or a viewpoint, to infect a whole society or result in acts of violence? This is an essential question that we must become better at answering if we are to effectively confront hatred in all its forms. My work reveals that, very often, hatred is constructed, fuelled, maintained and directed by certain individuals or groups against those individuals and communities who are different from themselves – different in their ethnicity, language or religion from the dominant majority – often for political reasons or due to long-standing and entrenched discrimination. Hateful messages may fall on particularly fertile ground where there are wider social, economic or political problems or divisions in society.

I have found that the root causes of hatred often lie beyond purely ethnic or religious difference. Such hatred very often stems from wider societal shortcomings, including the lack of access or unequal access to resources; partisan politics; corruption; and the reality or the perception of bias and favouritism along ethnic or religious lines, which can fuel distrust, suspicion and anger. This was made clear to me during some of my country visits, where I found evidence that such factors create the conditions under which the roots of tensions and hatred can emerge and take hold. I have also found that where inclusive governance, equality and human rights prevail and communities have placed trust in their leadership, there were fewer communal fractures and concerns about minority rights.

In my role as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues since 2011, I have received numerous complaints and letters from minority groups from all regions reporting allegations of hate-based human rights violations, including attacks against individuals, communities, their properties or places of worship. I have written letters to numerous governments, including among others, those of the Central African Republic, China, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Sri Lanka,

Sudan, Syria, the United States and Uzbekistan regarding concrete cases of threats, harassment, intimidation and attacks against ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities.

There have been intensive discussions within the United Nations system about the importance of prevention of mass atrocity crimes such as ethnic cleansing or genocide, and how to become better at spotting and responding to the early warning signs. The truth is that we have already failed if our attention is only captured by situations when people have already started attacking and killing each other. Governments, civil society and the international community must be alert to the warning signs much earlier: when the first words of hate speech are uttered, when media start to promote negative stereotypes, or once there is an atmosphere of discomfort and animosity when minorities exercise their right to use their language publicly or practise their religion. We must find ways to truly hear and understand the feelings and concerns of minority people, and not make quick or easy assumptions that minorities feel secure because of Constitutions and laws that codify minority rights on paper.

I have been genuinely shocked by my own recent exposure to hate speech with regard to the Black Pete figure in the Dutch ‘Sinterklaas’ celebration, a tradition which many believe perpetuates a negative stereotype and derogatory image of Africans and people of African descent. With several other mandate-holders, I had sent a letter to the government of the Netherlands raising concerns that many people consider aspects of this tradition to be racist and highly offensive. Shortly after the letter was made public, my Facebook page was flooded by hostile and intolerant messages that drowned out the moderate and concerned voices. Some people of African descent and others contacted me to tell me that the extreme and often racist social media reaction to their complaints had left them feeling fearful and anxious about repercussions – some decided to stay silent and no longer voice their legitimate concerns.

The above example and many others like it from different regions have clearly proved to me that there are legitimate grounds to limit freedom of speech when that speech includes,

is motivated by, or seeks to incite racial, religious or other forms of hatred. Some scholars take the view that the right to freedom of expression should be absolute. They refer to the fundamental nature of democracy and the social contract under which everyone has the right to express her or his views, suggesting that society should not permit the exclusion of any views, even if these are incompatible with democracy or offensive and inflammatory. These theories often fail to recognize the fundamental existence of structural inequalities in a society which make some more vulnerable, including to attack,

Below: A Roma girl studying at a school funded by the Roma Education Fund in Romania.
Bjoern Steinz/Panos.

whether physical or verbal.

It is hard to talk about upholding the values of democracy and equality if certain groups are completely excluded from participating in or shaping that democracy in practice. Equally, how can we talk about the pursuit of truth and justice if marginalized communities have no access to public platforms and communication channels, and have no possibilities to influence public opinion, or to seek and obtain justice? It would be grotesque to expect Roma communities in Europe to fight back on their own against the growing tide of hate speech pouring from public and mass media, from far-right groups and political parties, when Roma are almost completely excluded from mainstream media platforms and frequently lack any say in the



societies in which they live. The truth is that, where there are communities that are regarded as inferior in any society, their voices will also be treated as inferior, regardless of how loudly they shout and how valid their concerns.

I therefore greatly welcome this timely edition of Minority Rights Group International (MRG)'s annual report, which builds upon decades of their research, advocacy and publishing, and which will help to shed light on the real extent of the problem of hate speech and hate crimes as it exists worldwide. MRG's publication will create a better understanding among readers that hate speech and crimes are frequently targeted against those belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Like all of MRG's publications it provides extensive examples to make its case, but more than that, MRG and its many partners in all regions seek to deeply understand the challenges and causes as well as to propose solutions and strategies of prevention that can truly work in practice. In the pages of this publication you will find the kind of thoughtful and revealing analysis that can really make a difference, and which has helped to inform my own work to protect minority rights.

I believe that it is up to influential and non-minority people – including politicians, intellectuals, celebrities and ordinary people who are concerned about discrimination and hatred in their societies – to join marginalized and disadvantaged minorities in clearly demanding the principles of human rights, equality and human dignity for all. This coordinated fight must include legislative steps, but most importantly it requires swift and efficient social responses. If hate incidents are not tackled in time, those groups targeted will likely experience permanent injuries to their feelings of self-esteem and wider sense of belonging within their societies, making them even more marginalized. Another important threat is that without concerted action to confront hatred, majority communities themselves may gradually become desensitized, to the point where they begin to accept the hostility in their societies and the myth of ethnic, racial or religious inferiority of those targeted minority groups.

In order to identify hate speech and hate crimes at an early enough stage to prevent

them, it is essential that dedicated institutional attention is in place. Such bodies as governmental departments, parliamentary committees for human rights, national human rights institutions and other executive, legislative and law enforcement bodies should be mandated to deal with minority issues and concerns, to consult with minority communities, and to respond to incidents of hate speech and hate crimes wherever they occur. Most importantly, it is essential to ensure the participation of minorities in these institutional bodies and at every stage of their work so that they can play an effective role in shaping important and necessary laws, policies or programmes to confront hatred. Perpetrators of hate crimes must not be allowed to act with impunity and the penalties imposed on them should be appropriate in order to discourage others from committing similar hate-based offences.

Perhaps most importantly, we must ensure that our public and private educational systems and school curricula provide the tools to educate children from an early age about the benefits of diversity and the contribution of minority communities to the histories, cultural heritage and economic and social progress of their countries. All children should grow up valuing the diversity around them and with messages of acceptance for all within society. I am often asked whether we ever truly confront hatred. As Nelson Mandela told us and demonstrated through his life:

'No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.' ■

Minority Rights Group International

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities.

Our activities are focused on international advocacy, training, publishing and outreach. We are guided by the needs expressed by our worldwide partner network of organizations which represent minority and indigenous peoples.

MRG works with over 150 organizations in nearly 50 countries. Our governing Council, which meets twice a year, has members from nine different countries. MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), observer status with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and is registered with the Organization of American States.

MRG is registered as a charity and a company limited by guarantee under English law. Registered charity no. 282305, limited company no. 1544957.

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MRG website

Visit our website for news, publications and more information about MRG's work:
www.minorityrights.org

Minority Voices Newsroom

An online news portal that allows minority and indigenous communities to upload multimedia content and share their stories:
www.minorityvoices.org

Peoples under Threat

MRG's annual ranking showing countries most at risk of mass killing is now available as an online map:
www.peoplesunderthreat.org

World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples

The internet's leading information resource on minorities around the globe:
www.minorityrights.org/Directory

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014

Events of 2013

Across the world, minorities and indigenous peoples are disproportionately exposed to hatred. From intimidation and verbal abuse to targeted violence and mass killing, this hatred often reflects and reinforces existing patterns of exclusion. The impacts also extend beyond the immediate effects on individual victims to affect entire communities – in the process further marginalizing them from basic services, participation and other rights. This year's edition of *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples* highlights how hate speech and hate crime, though frequently unreported or unacknowledged, continue to impact on every aspect of their lives. The volume also documents many of the initiatives being taken to promote positive change and the different ways that governments, civil society and communities can strengthen protections for minorities and indigenous peoples.

