

# **Global Ministers Conference on Addressing Hate Speech through Education**

## **Introductory Remarks by the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu**

**26 October**

**8.00 AM, EST**

**CONFERENCE ROOM-8**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to also welcome you to the “Global Ministers Conference on Addressing Hate Speech through Education” jointly organised by UNESCO and my office – the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.

From the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres for convening this important event, and to the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay for partnering with my office during these last few months to organise it. I would also like to thank the co-chair of this conference, the President of Namibia, His Excellency Hage Geingob, as well as all the staff who tirelessly worked behind the scenes during this time to make this conference possible.

Distinguished Ministers,

On 18 June 2019, at the launch of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, the Secretary-General called on UNESCO and my office to jointly organize this Global Ministers’ conference on the role of education to build resilience against hate speech. I am glad that despite the challenges we faced because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to fulfil this request. This conference constitutes an integral part of the prevention agenda of the Secretary-General and is strongly connected to the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

It is also very relevant to my Focal Point responsibility in the UN system to implement the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, including by providing support to UN field entities to develop context-specific plans of action on hate speech. My office has so far provided support to the Country Teams in Bosnia, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Ethiopia and Kenya, to mention only some. We have also received many more requests of support from other Country Teams, as

well as from peace and political missions. Moreover, we are finalizing a guidance note on gender-based hate speech. We hope it will be ready in November this year.

When it comes to addressing and countering hate speech, sustainable development goals 4 (on quality education), and 16 (on peace, justice and strong institutions) are deeply interlinked. If we assume that lack of knowledge or ignorance is one of the main drivers of hate speech, we can also assume that the concerning patterns of increase in hateful rhetoric can be addressed through education. And because hate speech can trigger violence, conflict and even atrocity crimes, by supporting educational tools to tackle it, we can also contribute to the emergence and strengthening of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Distinguished Ministers,

Despite the many efforts made by many States to adopt the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the growing phenomenon of hate speech is threatening progress made in advancing peace and inclusivity globally.

Hate speech has very serious short- and long-term implications. From the perspective of my mandate, history has taught us that hateful narratives often precede the commission of atrocity crimes – genocide in particular. We have seen this in Rwanda in 1994 and in Srebrenica in 1995. And, regrettably, we continue to see it every day in various parts of the world where people continue to be killed based on their identity – often mobilized and incited through hateful rhetoric. This is why we must always be vigilant and respond to hate speech collectively and as a matter of priority.

The commitments of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech provide us with a framework for doing so.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Global Ministers' conference provides an opportunity to learn from your own experience on how you are using education in your own country to build societal resilience to hate speech. Based on that experience and on your lessons learned, we are also keen to hear your proposals on how the role of education could be strengthened to achieve this purpose.

Today's discussions will result in a summary of the conference's co-chairs, including recommendations. I truly hope this summary will be action oriented and allow for follow-up at global, regional, and national level. Together with UNESCO, my Office, as the UN system-wide focal point on hate speech, stand ready to provide support to the implementation of those recommendations.

I look forward to today's discussion and to taking this work forward as part of our ultimate objective to protect human dignity and save human lives.

Thank you for your attention.