Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the launch of Kenya National Action Plan against Hate Speech, 15 June 2022

Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court Martha Koome,

My sister SRSG Zaynab Bangura,

UN Resident Coordinator Stephen Jackson,

Reverend Dr. Samuel Kobia, Chairman of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, Honorable Commissioners,

Allow me to stand on existing protocol.

From the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Chairman and Commissioners, for their leadership that has led us to mark the formal launch of the Kenya National Action Plan against Hate Speech.

The Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has often expressed concern on growing trends of hate speech in conflict and post-conflict situations, on what he rightly calls the negative impact of “the tsunami of hate” – on progress made in advancing peace, security, and inclusivity globally.

In 2019, the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, therefore launched the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, with my office as the Focal Point to implement the Strategy. As UN Focal Point on Hate Speech, and leading an office with a global mandate, I know that hateful narratives constitute a challenge in many of the countries with UN field presence, to the point that my office directly supports some UN country teams, peacekeeping and special political missions specifically mandated to monitor, analyze and report hate speech trends.

My Office collects and analyzes information on risks of genocide. My Office has also developed the Framework of Analysis of Atrocity Crimes, a tool used to assess risks of genocide and other atrocity crimes. I provide early warning on actions to prevent or halt genocide. A key element of early warning is hate speech.

The General Assembly of the United Nations takes Hate Speech very seriously and indeed in July this year, passed resolution 75/309, with the strong support of my office, that proclaimed 18 June as the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, requesting the President of the General Assembly to organize a high-level
meeting on hate speech to mark the commemoration of the first such international day.

No country is immune to hate speech. Hate speech draws on divisions and sometimes pits people who have previously co-existed peacefully against each other. In conflict and post-conflict contexts, hate speech is vicious and dangerous, capitalizing, especially, on the vulnerability of specific groups. Hate speech is a threat to advancing peace, security and the respect and promotion of international human rights and humanitarian law, which is at the core of the work of the United Nations globally.

History teaches us that hate speech can be a precursor and an accompaniment to the commission of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We saw this in the Holocaust, and in the genocides in Rwanda against the Tutsi and Srebrenica, in Bosnia Herzegovina, where hate speech and the dehumanization of ‘the other’ was present during, after and long before violence broke out and such crimes were committed. I visited both countries recently, responding to growing concerns of online and offline persistent patterns of denial of the crime of genocide, glorification of war criminals, hate speech, and divisive rhetoric.

Ahead of the first celebration of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 75/309 on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech, Kenya is demonstrating global leadership in tackling this phenomenon and encouraging other Member States to follow suit.

It is the first such National Action Plan to be launched by any country in the world.

I must congratulate the National Cohesion and Integration Commission and the Government of Kenya for this exemplary feat.

I am glad that my Office was able to accompany the National Cohesion and Integration Commission alongside other State institutions, political parties, and secular and religious civil society to develop this very important document.

The collaborative approach adopted in the development of this document has ensured a final product based on a whole-of-society approach to tackle hate speech and which builds on the existing framework for countering hate speech in Kenya aligned with the UN Strategy and Plan of Action. This cannot be otherwise since
countering hate speech is a multi-stakeholder’s endeavor and all societal actors have a role to play.

The timing of the launch of Kenya’s National Action Plan against Hate Speech cannot be more apt, ahead of national elections and first celebration of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech.

While the focus of the National Action Plan is not only on elections, its adoption at this time, provides an additional, albeit critical tool in the arsenal of law enforcement in responding to the threat posed by hate speech to the electoral process. While inflammatory narratives related to the upcoming national elections need to be dealt with urgently, combating the root causes of hate speech in Kenya needs to be a long-term project aiming at building the resilience of all Kenyans against hate speech, including through education, and ultimately eradicating this phenomenon from the Kenyan society.

In the light of this recognition, the document we are launching today includes both short and long-term priorities. I am convinced that Kenya’s National Action Plan against Hate Speech will fully serve its purpose.

I take this opportunity to underline the importance for the United Nations to continue supporting Members States in addressing and countering hate speech in line with the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. In this context, my Office as the UN focal point on hate speech will continue its support to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, and the Government through accompanying you in the implementation of this groundbreaking National Action Plan against Hate Speech.

Hate speech and incitement to violence is a threat to peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development. By tackling this phenomenon in full respect of international human rights law we can achieve peaceful and inclusive societies without discrimination of any kind. The National Plan of Action is a critical building block in the effort to strengthen national cohesion and building an inclusive society in Kenya.

I congratulate the Government of Kenya and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission for this important milestone. I encourage you to also fully participate in the celebration of the first International Day for Countering Hate Speech to be marked in New York by a General Assembly debate on 20 June 2022 to showcase to the rest of the world this great achievement and groundbreaking document.
Thank you.