
Short Description: The Effects of Hate Speech

The United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the Second World War. Plenty of controversial opinions were discussed during the drafting period to decide whether or not to provide restrictions on the right to freedom of expression. A heated discussion was held about such limitations, as the member states were clarifying what their purpose should be. The nations of the world were motivated to prevent the spreading of intolerance and hate rooted in the war and the events leading up to it. The main aim was to minimize the results of such hate, as well as ensuring that events such as those which happened in Nazi Germany, would ever happen again. Unfortunately, the international community knows other consequences of hate propaganda, such as genocide in Rwanda, anti-Semitic attacks in Germany, and racial discrimination all over the world.

The Internet is considered to be one of the most, if not the most, important evolutionary steps in the advancement of freedom of speech in modern history. At the same time, a considerable amount of UN declarations, conventions, and conferences are about the protection of privacy and honor and prohibition of discrimination. Therefore, member states, already aware of dangers in the mid-1990s, made various legislative attempts to restrict and control content on the Internet, mostly in relation to protecting minors from harmful content. However, there has been a global increase in appeals for better regulation of social media platforms, including in Europe. In this respect, the control of «hate speech» is an important issue for governments, policy makers, regulatory bodies, self-regulatory institutions, media, civil society and, the public at large.

It can sometimes be difficult to recognize hate speech, because it is often «hidden» in a quite logical and natural sentence or statement. However, certain key points/standards, such as intent to stir up hatred against a certain group of people, incitement to hatred, and causal link, indicating hate speech, may be present. We can, therefore, assume that hate speech is not just about words. Each case must be examined in light of context, content, intent, and the likelihood of the speech to cause actual harm.

Our history clearly shows how horrifying the effects of hate speech can be. There are many examples of hate speech, which were not considered to led certain groups of people being disrespected and discrimination against them not being illegitimate. The most serious instances have led to social separatism and even to conflict. This is not acceptable in a democratic society.