

Strengthening national efforts to address hate speech, discrimination, and prevent incitement

Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC)
Outcome Document of the Fourth Global Meeting -GAAMAC IV-

Introduction

Held virtually over three days (November 15-18, 2021), GAAMAC IV convened key actors working on atrocity prevention at its fourth Global Meeting. Despite the enduring pandemic, the virtual character of the meeting enabled more than 300 participants to engage actively on ways to strengthen national efforts on issues central to prevention: hate speech, discrimination, and incitement. Participants came from more than 65 countries, representing governments, international organizations, national institutions, academia and civil society. Of all speakers, 58% were women.

The Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC) is a community of commitment composed of states, civil society and academic institutions that pledges to prevent atrocities by establishing or strengthening national prevention mechanisms and policies. Since its inception in 2013, GAAMAC has grown into a well-respected convener of key players and organizations, a role that enables its diverse worldwide constituency to engage in frank and often difficult discussions about sensitive topics.

GAAMAC offers a trusted space to talk about real issues: A space in which to share good practices; to jointly learn from successes and failures without pointing fingers; and to search together for concrete and feasible solutions. GAAMAC provides a place where all actors can celebrate small steps and victories together.

GAAMAC is led by a Steering Group, whose composition is innovative and unique, true to GAAMAC's founding principles of complementarity between states and civil society. GAAMAC is currently chaired by Argentina under the leadership of Judge Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi.

The Fourth Global GAAMAC meeting built on the previous GAAMAC Global Meetings that took place in Costa Rica (2014), the Philippines (2016) and Uganda (2018). This fourth meeting, originally scheduled to take place in Den Haag but carried out entirely online, was hosted by GAAMAC's Steering Group and chaired by Judge Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi of Argentina.

The meeting was inaugurated by messages from high level personalities and supporters of GAAMAC:

- Minister Santiago Cafiero, Foreign Minister of Argentina;
- Minister Liberata Mulamula, Foreign Minister of Tanzania and Patron of the Africa Working Group;
- Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
- Adama Dieng, former UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide;
- Akila Radhakrishnan, President of the Global Justice Center.

The High-level plenary sessions were dedicated to crucial topical issues, such as addressing hate speech in an era of increasing intolerance; hate speech as a risk indicator and triggering factor of mass atrocities; as well as the need to counter hate speech as a means to foster prevention of discrimination and incitement at the national level. Because the wider GAAMAC community pledges to make prevention a reality on the ground, the second set of plenaries analyzed good practices and lessons learned from national mechanisms worldwide, including

those from the European Continent and experts from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Promising examples on how to tackle the complexities of shaping atrocity prevention from the ground up were discussed among all participants, including those reporting on the work of GAAMAC's Regional Initiatives.

During the 15 workshops held by the diverse GAAMAC Community of Commitment including governments, institutions, members of parliament, academia, experts from the UN human rights bodies and partners provided participants with lively, focused and horizontal exchanges. A robust interaction took place between and among guest experts, practitioners and participants. Insights were shared and recommendations were formulated which are integrated in this GAMAC IV outcome document.

The Innovation Square convened participants around concrete initiatives in the field of atrocity prevention that have already been implemented around the world. In this dedicated space, participants were exposed to many prevention processes and initiatives carried out by the very diverse and innovative GAAMAC worldwide community of practice.

During the last day plenary, a preview of the draft GAAMAC IV outcome document was shared with participants who were invited to send their comments and suggested revisions.

Hate speech, discrimination and incitement: what it is, how to address it and how to prevent it

During the plenary sessions, participants underlined the urgent need for a joint conceptual and normative understanding of hate speech, discrimination and incitement. They insisted on the importance of realizing joint and mutually complementary initiatives, framed in concrete and efficient terms to address the current challenges and gaps. Such complementary and internationally coordinated action is key to increasing the opportunities for exchanging lessons learned and promoting good practices around the globe. Atrocity prevention is a global challenge and as such must be addressed at the global, regional and national levels. It follows then that hate speech, discrimination and incitement - what it is, how to prevent it – must become part of the multilateral and regional agendas and be regularly discussed in multilateral and regional fora so that the policies and decisions to be implemented at the national level can be made effective and influential. While recognizing that hate speech, discrimination and incitement take different forms in different cultural contexts and societies, participants also acknowledged that Europe is now significantly challenged by these issues. There was a sense that participants wanted to contribute to the International Day for Countering Hate Speech on the 18th of June 2022.

International human rights instruments, covenants and treaties, notably Art. 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), are useful tools to address and prevent hate speech, discrimination and incitement. This normative and legal framework, through a human rights-based approach, respects the delicate balance between the prevention of hate speech, discrimination and incitement and the freedom of expression. To coordinate related efforts globally, the United Nations Secretary General has further launched in June 2019 the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. The strategy recognizes that over the past 75 years, hate speech has been a precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide, from Rwanda to Bosnia to Cambodia.

These human rights instruments, covenants and treaties notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) must be universally ratified and implemented throughout the world.

There is an intrinsic relationship between the prevention of hate speech, discrimination, and incitement and the consolidation of democracy: Successful prevention can happen only through democratic public policies and these, in turn, will contribute to strengthening democracy and the sense of common good.

Hate speech, as well as incitement, often uses and spreads false information, thus practicing disinformation. Although social media fuels, accelerates and spreads hate speech, this vehicle does not create it. In certain regions, most hate speech is produced and disseminated by State actors. In this sense, hate speech builds on the existence of all forms of prejudice and maximizes their reach. It may incite certain behaviors against constructed figures of the other--who may become an enemy--and incitement may generate a "license to kill" this despised person who is no longer considered an equal human being. Similar patterns have been reflected in conspiracy narratives and myths. Participants recalled that this pronounced trend in the phenomena of hate speech is precisely the reason why hate speech, discrimination and incitement constitute serious early warning signals on a path that could lead to the commission of violence, and eventually atrocities.

Hate speech in essence is both a risk indicator and a triggering factor in the commission of atrocity crimes.

Participants emphasized two processes that are essential to preventing and combating hate speech and incitement. The first is dialogue, empathetic listening and education programs that target all levels of education aimed to strengthen and empower people, in particular the youth, to exert critical and autonomous judgement and to resist fake news, disinformation, hate speech and inducements to incitement. The second is the establishment of a robust legal accountability framework for both individuals and corporations. Indeed, corporate responsibility and individual accountability are key factors in determining whether or not the private sector can manage social media and communication tools in a responsible and ethical manner. Training of professionals and public servants and awareness-raising campaigns as well as education need to take place in all different spheres of society in order to empower actors to protect democracy, manage diversity, promote human rights, and rapidly address hate speech, discriminatory language, messages of incitement and fake news.

While governments must be fully engaged, in line with their core protection responsibility, the creation of national prevention mechanisms and policies convening all actors involved, is key to making prevention a reality on the ground. These national prevention approaches will allow each society to design and implement locally grounded and tailor-made initiatives, policies and laws that enjoy legitimacy and credibility, generate trust and empower a culture and practice of democracy. Among others, these initiatives will compel technology companies and their outreach platforms to develop clear guidelines that provide adequate and efficient tools to address hate speech, fake news, discrimination and incitement messages. Such national prevention platforms must seek to convene the diversity of actors across societies and empower them to take initiatives in their respective fields.

Main recommendations from the Workshops

Gender-based hate speech

Hate speech continues to target women disproportionately, based on their leadership roles, religion, sexual orientation and race. Toxic masculinities in different contexts can lead to dehumanization of the other and glorification of violence, justifying systematic rape and use of torture as a form of ethnic cleansing. Toxic masculinities may also serve to reshape and distort history by reconstructing false nationalistic narratives. Participants stressed the need to develop a more in-depth gender-based approach to assess and prevent hate speech against women in social media and other forms.

Furthermore, participants recommended that policy papers, including specific recommendations, be produced to better understand the relation between gender-based violence and hate speech and discrimination.

Participants recommended the development of training and programs that focus on key understandings about gender-inflected hate speech within security institutions, schools and private companies, complemented by the establishment of clear legal frameworks providing accountability and redress for survivors, targeted and harmed.

Hate speech as a risk indicator and a triggering factor in the commission of atrocity crimes

The Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, as other genocides, did not happen overnight: They were the result of prior decades of distortion, fake news, propaganda and conspiracy theories-creating an “other” to be rejected and/or eliminated.

Education about genocide, promoted for instance by UNESCO, can deepen reflection about these issues that continue to affect societies around the world, such as the power of extremist ideologies, propaganda, and group-targeted hate speech and violence, by developing understanding of their role in facilitating past atrocity crimes. By studying the past, learners can explore the techniques used to manipulate a society through propaganda, disinformation and hate speech.

Participants agreed that there is a clear link between disinformation, fake news and hate speech, stressing the need that technology companies and social media platforms ought to increase their efforts to counter fake news online and develop more robust policies on the matter.

In noting the urgency of time, participants recommend adopting timely measures to promote accountability of social media companies: legal frameworks are urgently needed to ensure that social media companies endorse their legal responsibilities in the spreading of fake news and hate speech corporate. Global monitors are needed who can recognize the diverse patterns and expectations of different societies. It requires the practice of civil courage to engage in such social monitoring on the internet.

Participants recommended that IHRA and GAAMAC work closer together in a mutually complementary alliance so the “never again” would not become a reality on the ground today or into the future.

In contexts where atrocities are happening or have happened, participants underlined the crucial importance of realizing holistic transitional justice; establishing the facts, listening to the

narratives of the affected communities, providing reparation, creating processes of administrative, legal and restorative justice, and proceeding to institutional reforms.

Addressing hate speech, a whole of society effort

A key policy in the prevention of atrocities must be the promotion of increased efforts in the field of education, and, particularly, in education programs for the youth as well as the involvement of youth in finding solutions.

Participants therefore recommended that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and GAMMAC maximize their collaboration efforts to reinforce national and international prevention efforts through education in human rights, global citizenship and in promotion of peace.

Participants recommended that collective efforts be undertaken in the full implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality education) and notably on the achievement of Target 4.7, by promoting of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity through education.

Education systems should integrate specific and evidenced-based educational interventions that explicitly address hate speech at all levels of education – from early-childhood to tertiary levels, in formal and non-formal settings, including through lifelong learning.

Media and Information Literacy can strengthen the resilience of learners to hate speech, and build their capacity to recognize and counter mis- and dis-information, violent extremism and conspiracy theories, and teachers should be supported through training and resources to adopt approaches that highlight multi-perspectivity, and the voices of people and groups affected by identity-based hatred and violence.

Education can be employed to dehumanize certain groups and discriminate against vulnerable groups in societies, including in Rwanda prior to the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi. Hate speech and exclusionary narratives should be removed from curricula, textbooks and educational resources. Those who incite hatred and violence, instil fear and commit atrocities, must be held accountable, including by using education as a tool of justice.

These interventions should complement other educational policies, such as programs that aim to end all forms of violence in schools, prevent the spread of violent extremist ideologies and promote respect for diversity¹.

Participants invited the GAAMAC community of practice to convene events such as awareness-raising and to develop ascertainment capacities in order to promote and develop robust prevention efforts worldwide through education, such as laid out in UNESCO's policy guidance on "educating about the Holocaust and preventing genocide" and the forthcoming policy guide on "Addressing hate speech through education", developed jointly with the United Nations Office for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.

¹ Conclusions UNESCO 26 October 2021 Global Ministerial Conference on Addressing hate speech through education: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379729>
<https://en.unesco.org/news/addressing-hate-speech-through-education-global-education-ministers-conference>

In fulfilling their responsibilities to protect all citizens, participants urged states, regional and multilateral entities to include prevention of hate speech, discrimination and incitement in their agendas.

For this, participants recommended supporting national prevention mechanisms taking into account local values and identifying the main current needs, such as the promotion of peace, fairness, and minority rights along with constructive management of diversity and efforts to eliminate public usage of language promoting identity-based violence.

Hate speech, discrimination and incitement against minorities and other vulnerable groups

Participants recommended appointing officials trained in using an atrocity prevention lens in all institutions dealing with minorities and other vulnerable groups, such as security, justice, and education. Minorities and other vulnerable groups, among these migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, are under increased risk due to the surge in hate speech, discrimination and incitement and experience threats, or even worse, in many contexts and in particular in Europe.

In Europe, participants pointed out, some minorities, among them the Roma community continue to suffer ongoing cultural, structural and direct violence through mechanisms of hate speech and discrimination. Despite current efforts, participants stressed that the Roma/Sinti community and other vulnerable groups and minorities must be fully included in these efforts to implement existing legal frameworks and undertake massive education programs on diversity, and constructive management thereof. Furthermore, participants called on States to ratify and to fully implement the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (International Labour Organization Convention 169).

Cultural acceptance of the LGBTI persons remains globally low, and they remain among the most vulnerable groups to stigmatization, violence and discrimination. Participants agreed that more needs to be done from states to carry out more robust and effective anti-discrimination and awareness campaigns on these issues, promoting education values anchored in the concepts of inclusion, empathy and diversity.

Successful prevention and tackling of hate and discrimination against religious minorities happens when different religions, via religious leaders, come together and interreligious dialogue is initiated. There was broad consensus among participants that national prevention mechanisms should stress further the huge potential for the prevention of mass atrocities that lies within interreligious dialogue, thus calling for religious leaders to engage more actively on it, recognizing the great difference that religious leadership can make for the prevention agenda.

Furthermore, GAAMAC, as a platform of actors joining collective efforts, participants recommended that GAAMAC could encourage new initiatives in Europe to raise moral and legal/normative standards in different European organisations to implement existing obligations to prevent identity-based violence and promote diversity. This platform could also aim to connect like-minded groups online, to enhance connectivity and promote bridging of existing initiatives.

Ways forward: continuing engaging GAAMAC's Community through Thematic and Regional Initiatives

The contributions by the GAAMAC regional initiatives were again a highlight of the global meeting. These initiatives allow states and CSOs to work together in order to be better equipped to face specific challenges in their regions, to produce concrete and measurable inputs and results, including analytic elaborations of the issues at stake. Together, these regional initiatives develop concrete solutions to address issues, to exchange good practices and lessons learned from past failures, and to promote nationally owned atrocity prevention architectures and policies complementary to existing regional and multilateral efforts.

During GAAMAC IV, the Africa Working Group (AWG) shared its progress report in increasing knowledge and awareness on atrocity prevention through the dissemination of the “Manual on Best Practices for the Establishment and Management of National Mechanisms for Genocide and Mass Atrocities Prevention” amongst the armed and security forces and members of parliament in Côte d’Ivoire. The AWG also shared its new tools and publications:

- “The training toolkit: establishing and managing national mechanisms for mass atrocity and;
- research on case studies: “The Right to freedom of expression, fake news, hate speech and election violence in Cameroon”; “Mapping elections-related atrocity crimes triggers in Cameroon”; “Addressing COVID-19 misinformation, fake news and hate speech in South Sudan and Nigeria and; “The COVID-19 pandemic as atrocity crime trigger in Africa”.

The Americas Group shared the main findings of its Policy Brief on “Lessons learned from armed conflicts in Colombia and Guatemala to prevent violence against girls and women”.

The Asia Pacific Study Group shared insights on their recently published research on “Preventing hate speech, incitement and discrimination: lessons on promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in the Asia Pacific”.

During the fourth global meeting, the following recommendations emerged from the participants:

- A number of European stakeholders decided to convene again before the end of the year to decide on the formation of a European regional initiative.
- A sub-regional group of key actors in Canada and the United States emerged to work on issues related to discrimination in the North America region. Furthermore, recognizing the need to define prevention more robustly, a working group might be constituted to propose a working paper to enhance the understanding of prevention in action.
- A thematic initiative emerged from GAAMAC IV and recommended conducting research on hate speech and atrocity prevention.
- The Americas Regional Initiative recommended to join efforts with the Latin American Network for Genocide and Atrocity Prevention as well as on the need and potential in promoting and sharing best practices from the Inter-American System of Human Rights.
- The Asia Pacific Study Group will disseminate its research on hate speech as an awareness-raising tool in the region, with the involvement of a variety of actors, including members of parliaments, practitioners, and others.
- The Africa Working Group will continue raising awareness on and support for atrocity prevention through the dissemination of its “Manual on Best Practices for the Establishment and Management of National Mechanisms for Genocide and Mass Atrocities Prevention”. The Africa Working Group also suggested conducting a baseline assessment on atrocity prevention actors and status in the region, It also

recommended convening a dialogue between all GAAMAC Regional Initiatives to share ideas, good practices and lessons learned.

The next global meeting, GAAMAC V, is envisaged to take place in 2023.