



## All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

# ANTI-HATE SPEECH POLICY BRIEF

### **AACC's identity:**

The AACC is a continental ecumenical body that accounts for over 140 million Christians across the continent. It is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Indigenous churches in Africa and is a member of the worldwide ecumenical network. AACC is a fellowship of 204 members comprising of Churches, National Councils of Churches (NCCs), theological and lay training institutions and other Christian organizations in 43 African countries.

Its vision is: Churches in Africa together for life, peace, justice and dignity. Part of AACC's mission is to “act prophetically in word, life and services for healing; and mobilizing to faithfully live the message of God's love”.

### **Process**

A research was conducted on hate speech which sought to answer policy questions related to hate speech using Kenya, South Sudan, and Sudan in the Horn of Africa region, as a case study. The research study was validated in a policy dialogue workshop that took place on 27 – 28 September 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya in which participants came from multilateral institutions, academia, faith-based organizations, civil society, members of parliament, and AACC member churches mainly from the Horn of Africa region.

The validation workshop resonated well with the spirit of Ubuntu, and the golden rule of treating others the way one wants to be treated (Matthew 7:12) – in all efforts to curb hate speech. The workshop acknowledged that the spirit of Ubuntu is in line with some of the world religions. Anti-hate speech is hatched rather within oneself, and only from within can it be radiated outwards to others. Otherwise, asking and expecting anti-hate speech of others which one does not embody is toiling in vain.

## Key results from the study and policy dialogue

- Hate speech was confirmed to be prevalent in the Horn of Africa region. It manifests itself in and through offensive words, through derogatory terms, misspelt names, attacks on ethnic groups, misogyny, heated campaign and political rallies, ethnic stereotyping, abusive and diminutive language on social media, and in unfiltered print/ electronic media.
- It was observed that there is no common/universal definition of hate speech accepted globally. However, countries in the Horn of Africa have adopted different contexts of the word hate speech and therefore localized the definition to fit into the country context. This has provided an opportunity for countries and democratic institutions to address hate speech through policy and practice.
- It was observed that there is a need for gendered policies on hate speech. Oftentimes, policies and legal mechanisms on hate speech miss the gender aspects and dynamics associated with hateful speech, particularly hateful speech towards women and young women.
- The policy dialogue workshop stressed the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation with the aim to extensively lobby for policies, legal frameworks, mechanisms or structures that promote and provide for a common approach to addressing hate speech.

Moreover, the participants took note of the intersectionality between hate speech and freedom of expression. It was discussed that although existing policies, conventions, protocols, and constitutional provisions provide for the right of freedom of expression, the protection and fulfilment of human dignity at the community & all levels must be the ultimate aim for policy making on anti-hate speech, and that this dimension must never be lost in attempts to create policy.

The plenary stressed the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation with the aim to extensively lobby for policies, legal frameworks, mechanisms, or structures that promote and provide for a common approach to addressing hate speech.

Furthermore, the importance of promoting continued dialogue on best practices and approaches for addressing hate speech, as well as ensuring policy formulation and implementation in the region cannot be underestimated.

Given the aforementioned fundamental highlights, the following policy recommendations were drawn for stakeholders as a way forward for developing, adopting and/or implementing policies on hate speech.

### 1. Policy Recommendations for AACC

#### Advocacy

AACC to converge faith institutions, including its own constituency, and civic actors in the Horn of Africa in a process that envisions a common approach of condemning hate speech, and encouraging governments to enhance their efforts to curb it. Some armed conflicts in the Horn of Africa region have been fuelled by hate speech if not ignited by it.

#### Capacity Building

AACC to build capacity for its advocacy team; and support advocacy efforts so as to enhance engagement with the governments in the region on structures and ways of tackling hate speech. Additionally, AACC must support the efforts of its member churches at local/ country level to curb the spread of hate speech.

## Continuous Peace Education and Raising Awareness on Freedom of Speech

AACC to advocate for peace education to start at early child development education in schools; and all the way up to tertiary education including in theological training institutions, and religious, and civil meetings. It is crucial that in the prevailing African context, such education on anti-hate speech is intensified during the pre-election periods in order to raise awareness of it with the aim of achieving and holding social cohesion in communities. Hate speech commonly flares up in the pre-election period (according to AACC research).

## Build Multi-stakeholder Coalitions and Collaborations

- AACC should engage the African Union, and its related institutions to lobby for legal frameworks and structures that will ensure that all African countries adopt a common approach to addressing hate speech across Africa.
- AACC should convene multi-stakeholder dialogues to engage with others on hate speech trends, occurrences, and how to counter it.
- AACC to prioritize preventive educational approaches that alert to hate speech when it is on the rise; including when it begins to manifest intensely on virtually and other platforms etc. AACC must strive to foster media and information literacy on hate speech alongside mitigation and counter efforts.

## Legislation and Prosecution of Perpetrators of Hate Speech

AACC to lobby governments in the region to undertake amendments to the laws in place in order to adopt a standardized definition of hate speech in line with international standards. The perpetrators of hate speech must be prosecuted.

## 2. Policy Recommendations for Civic Groups, Faith-Based Organizations, and Community Based Organizations

### Advocacy

- Civic groups and FBOs should promote the multiplication of localized mechanisms that address hate speech, including the promotion of community-led, best and promising practices of curbing hate speech.
- Considering the existence of frameworks at the global and continental levels, these groups should lobby among governments to domesticate, contextualize and localize such mechanisms.

### Awareness and Education

- Civic groups and FBOs should use their platforms, and other platforms accessible to them, to increase awareness on the pitfalls of hate speech, and how it may lead to armed conflicts and conflicts in general. They must encourage each other to draw on local knowledge and from their faith/scriptures as applicable - to champion social cohesion in communities and to neutralize hate speech, and give hope of a harmonious living.

### 3. Policy Recommendations for Policy Institutions and Government Bodies

#### Legislation & Frameworks

- African governments and policy institutions should adopt a standardized African definition of hate speech in line with international standards; legislate policies that address hate - speech; and deliberately promote anti-hate speech environments through common policies and legislation.
- African governments and policy institutions must embed anti-hate speech in their frameworks for peace in Africa.
- African governments to promote peace education at all recognized levels of education (such as from early childhood development to tertiary level, and in informal education.)

#### Policy dialogue

African governments and policy institutions to engage in constructive dialogue on hate speech in a continuous manner with a quest to promote social cohesion, but also to provide thought leadership that could lead to a common understanding and common definition of hate speech among AU member states.

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