

Geneva, 25 November 2014

Oral statement at the seventh session of the Forum on Minority Issues ("Preventing and Addressing Violence and Atrocity Crimes Targeted against Minorities") of the United Nations Human Rights Council

## **ONLINE HATE SPEECH AND INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE AGAINST AUTISTICS**

Thank you, Mister Chair.

Autistic self-advocates view autism not as something to be prevented or cured, but as a lifelong neurological difference that is equally valid. Autism is a distinct culture and identity, and we suffer the same discrimination as other minorities. Much remains to be done to ensure the full and equal participation of the autistic minority, estimated at seventy million people, or one percent of the world's population, in all areas of public, economic, and social life, as called for by a 2012 resolution of the UN General Assembly.

Our full and equal participation is stifled in particular by the persistent and widespread bias and prejudice against persons on the autism spectrum. The public discourse on autism is dominated by negative stereotypes. For example, the media regularly blame school shootings on the perpetrators having had Asperger's, a condition on the autism spectrum, mostly without any evidence to substantiate such a claim. Fact is, autistics are much more likely to become the victims of violence.

While "aspie" is a term of affection for persons diagnosed with Asperger's, googling the phrase "aspies should" in English-speaking countries currently results in the autocomplete suggestions "aspies should be locked up" and "aspies should die". Googling "autistic child should", the autocomplete suggestion is "autistic child should be euthanized". Due to our organization's advocacy efforts, Google removed autocomplete suggestions such as "autistics are evil", "autistics are not human", "autistics should die", and "autistics should be euthanized". However, when searching "autistics are", - Google still suggests "autistics are dangerous" and "autistics should be killed" as related searches at the bottom of search result pages. The search phrase "autistic persons" still returns the related searches suggestions "autistic people need to die" and "autistic people should [be] killed". The search phrase "autistic people should" yields the related searches suggestions "autistic people should die" and "autistic people should be killed".

When searching for the phrase "autistic people should" on Microsoft's search engine Bing, the related searches suggestions are "I Hate Autistic\_People", "Autistic People Should Die", and "Autistic People Should Be Killed". On Yahoo, the search phrases "autistics are" and "autistics should" result in the autocomplete and related searches suggestions "autistics are not human" and "autistics should die", respectively, while "autistic pople" autocompletes as "autistic people should the", and the search phrase "autistic people should" triggers the autocomplete and related searches suggestion

"autistic people should die". Searching for the phrase "aspies are" on Yahoo leads to the autocomplete and related searches suggestion "aspies are evil".

Autistic children using search engines and social media grow up with the knowledge that they are disliked. Hate speech produced by search engine algorithms reinforces the negative public perception of the autistic minority and perpetually incites violence against autistic persons in real life.

Thank you.

Erich Kofmel, President  
Autistic Minority International

## **Background information**

Our NGO, Autistic Minority International, headquartered in Geneva, is the first and only autism self-advocacy organization active at the global political level. Autistic Minority International is an associate member of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO), a member of the NGO Forum for Health, a Geneva-based consortium of organizations committed to promoting human rights and quality care in global health, and a member of UNICEF's Global Partnership on Children with Disabilities (GPCwd) and its Task Force on Child Protection.

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2 April World Autism Awareness Day. On that day in 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote: "This international attention is essential to address stigma, lack of awareness and inadequate support structures. Now is the time to work for a more inclusive society, highlight the talents of affected people and 'ensure opportunities for them to realize their potential.'"

In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 67/82 • "Addressing the socioeconomic needs of individuals, families and societies affected by autism spectrum disorders, developmental disorders and associated disabilities". In this resolution, the UN member states recognize "that the full enjoyment by persons with autism spectrum disorders [...] of their human rights and their full participation will result in significant advances in the social and economic development of societies and communities" and stress "the important contribution that non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors can make in promoting human rights for [...] all individuals with autism spectrum disorders [...] and their integration in societies". The GA voices its concern "that persons with autism spectrum disorders [...] continue to face barriers in their participation as equal members of society" and calls this "discrimination" and "a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person".

Autistic Minority International welcomes contact from and is open to collaboration with UN member states, the UN system, the wider NGO community, autism charities run by non-autistics, researchers particularly in the social sciences and international law, the private sector, and individuals. We look forward to interacting with participants in the forum as well as other minority rights stakeholders in the near future.