

Dear organizers and participants of this session,

My statement is designed to highlight to storytelling as a cause for hate speech on social media. Some scholars have called us – the humans - “social animals”, while others portray us as “storytelling animals”. Indeed, we use social media to tell stories because storytelling is necessary for our survival not just as individuals but also as groups, communities or nations. It is absolutely normal to use social media for storytelling. It is also normal to tell stories for survival. But the problem is, stories inevitably contain bias, which may lead to othering and prejudice. Othering and prejudice in turn lead to hate speeches that eventually end up in hate crimes oftentimes against minorities. So, a basic challenge is, how to address such dichotomic character of storytelling?

I offer you to take a brief look to the case of Azerbaijan that has adopted multiculturalism as an official policy, and accordingly, shapes and reshapes its stories to make them inclusive of minorities. Such inclusive stories assign a positive role to minorities and highlight positive contributions from those minorities to wider society. As a tangible result of such approach, credible international institutions in particular US Department of State have reported for many, consecutive years no anti-Semitic act in this Muslim-majority nation.

On this positive note, I conclude my statement by wishing a very good luck to all of you in the work of the session. Thank you!