

University of Minnesota Law School

Item 5: Steps Forward

Thank you. The meetings of this forum have clearly highlighted that minorities are the target of content inciting hate and violence. However, where a government cannot be relied upon to apply the law without discrimination, and there is the possibility of the law being used to repress the very groups it allegedly seeks to protect, the solution to hate speech cannot be governmental regulation alone.

In Sri Lanka, the government and its political proxies are the primary producers of hate speech. The government also fails to control hate speech against minorities on social media. Further, the content-regulating laws are applied unequally. People from minority communities have been arrested when they verbally counter Buddhist extremism, but the Sri Lanka Telecommunication Commission has not investigated a single Buddhist monk for their hate speech against minority communities. The strategic and intentional fear created by arbitrary arrests heightens the climate of fear and self-censorship.

Going forward, actions by international and transnational organizations in various capacities, including that of watchdogs, will be essential. There must be consistent standards, including on sexualized violence on online platforms. External monitors and companies must be independent from the government. They should engage with local communities to ensure that control of hate speech does not result in a backlash.

Social media companies have a central role to play by building capacity to more effectively manage social media content in Sri Lanka, especially around gender-based violence. Facebook and other social media platforms should invest in resources and expertise in all local languages and vernacular so as to protect the linguistic minority against content inciting hate and also, make a commitment to responding quickly to hate speech.

Thank you for including civil society in this forum. We recommend that companies and international organizations continue to consult and engage with civil society actors and human rights defenders, especially minorities at the local level who are most directly impacted by hate speech on social media.