

Thank you, Mrs. President

My name is Pastor Lewis from Iraq and I speak on behalf of the Peace and Freedom Organization.

Mrs. Special Rapporteur, confronting the widespread hate speech against minorities in the various media does not only promote social awareness, spread a culture of tolerance and intercultural dialogue,

but it also enhances the representation of members of minorities to directly confront negative expressions.

The question that minority rights activists have brought up is how to guarantee that members of minorities have access to freedom of expression in the media under selective interpretations of a variety of legal provisions in Iraq?

Ensuring the effective participation of minority members through the media is a key way to achieve a pluralistic approach that goes beyond their soft integration mechanisms.

It is the state's responsibility to distinguish between freedom of expression and the prohibition of any negative expression towards minorities, especially the expression that constitutes a crime under international law obligations, that justifies a complaint, or that violates the principle of respect for others. However, what's frustrating in Iraq is how much hate speech is ignored on the pretext that it is not criminalized at the national level or that it is tolerated because of how constitutional provisions are interpreted.

Hate speech against minorities must be clearly criminalized by law, and the criminalization must be linked to screening through non-routine criteria that look at the context, content and expression of the speaker's intent, relevant impact and the extent of the harm as well as an indication of whether it constitutes an imminent danger.

While digital media has enabled members of minorities to participate in media discourse more broadly, it has provided more access for extremist and violent organizations or groups in Iraq to spread hate speech or incite violence against minorities.

Minority women also experience double the pressures of exclusion and missed opportunities due to their exposure to double levels of discriminatory hate speech.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

The legislative authority in Iraq must align national legislation in the fight against hate speech with Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and not be limited to the first and second paragraphs of Article 19 thereof.

State institutions, in partnership with Internet service providers, should develop a mechanism that establishes an executive regulation to track and remove hate speech-related content.

There is a need to include in the curriculum at all stages in Iraq materials that promote all actions against hate speech, especially against minorities.

Thanks so much!