Thank you for the opportunity to add the Southern Poverty Law Center's voice to the 16th session on the Forum on Minority Issues by sharing "Positive Examples, Good Practices and Approaches" to advance the rights of minorities and inclusive and cohesive societies.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) was founded in Montgomery, Alabama in 1971 to ensure that the promise of the civil rights movement became a reality for all. Today, the SPLC envisions a world in which everyone can thrive, and the ideals of equity, justice, and liberation are a reality for all. Our mission is to be a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people.

White supremacy has become more overt, normalized, and dangerous following the January 6 attacks. Congress failed to pass federal legislation to restore the Voting Rights Act, while states throughout the South passed draconian voter suppression measures and drew redistricting maps based on partisan and racial gerrymandering. Far right extremists continue to use racist tactics to ramp up their base and intimidate local communities and leaders. Violent hate crimes oppress and kill people of color, religious minorities, and LGBTQ-identified people, traumatizing communities who see little to no redress by their elected officials.

The legacies of genocide, slavery, and Jim Crow that grew out of the South continue to perpetuate injustice and harm people today. SPLC is committed to changing the South to lead the way for the rest of the U.S...

SPLC's work is currently focused in five U.S. Deep South states – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi. These states are key battlegrounds in the fight to protect our democracy, reverse the tide of white nationalism, and end poverty and mass incarceration. Since the attacks on the Reconstruction movement and impact of Jim Crow laws, state governments in the Deep South have prioritized keeping power and influence in the hands of wealthy, white landholders. These elected officials have rejected the efforts of the federal government to reduce poverty and economic disparities and instead have used scarce resources to build more prisons and benefit those who already have advantages. Today, these same policymakers are seeking to suppress the vote, challenge the teaching of truthful history in public schools, and dismantle democratic institutions.

The SPLC has established four programmatic impact goals to focus our work over the next five years [1]:
1. Strengthen democracy by increasing voter turnout, challenging voter suppression measures, and ensuring representational diversity.
2. Relegate white supremacy out of the mainstream, reduce its impact on American democracy, and prevent violent harms inflicted on Black and Brown people.
3. Reduce the incarcerated and detained population by decriminalizing and decarcerating Black and Brown people.
4. Eradicate poverty by expanding access to opportunity and eliminating racial economic inequality.

In consideration of the goals for the 16th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues convening representatives of minorities from around the world together with others from governments, NHRIs and civil society to discuss ways of addressing the issue of hate speech, the role of social media and the protection of the human rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, I will focus this presentation on positive examples, good practices, and approaches the SPLC and its partners are utilizing to reduce the impact of hate and extremism on U.S. democracy.

Political violence has a long history in the United States. Starting in the late 1970s, political violence shifted rightward with the rise of white supremacist, anti-abortion, and militia groups. The number of

violent events declined, but targets shifted from property to people—minorities, abortion providers, and federal agents. [2]

Two subgroups appear most prone to violence. The January 2021 American Perspectives Survey found that white Christian evangelical Republicans were outsized supporters of both political violence and the Q-Anon conspiracy, which claims that Democratic politicians and Hollywood elites are pedophiles who (aided by mask mandates that hinder identification) traffic children and harvest their blood; separate polls by evangelical political scientists found that in October 2020 approximately 47 percent of white evangelical Christians believed in the tenets of Q-Anon, as did 59 percent of Republicans.[3]

The bedrock idea uniting right-wing communities who condone violence is that white Christian men in the United States are under cultural and demographic threat and require defending—and that it is the Republican Party and Donald Trump, in particular, who will safeguard their way of life.[4]

In 2020, SPLC partnered with Western States Center to launch a campaign to address extremism in elections in U.S. Deep South and the Pacific Northwest states.
- In Georgia, SPLC led a coalition of the Carter Center, Fair Fight, ADL, and others calling on businesses to speak out and denounce political violence. In Oregon, Western States Center led a regional coalition of civil society and elected leaders denouncing the January 6th attack on the Capitol, launched a rapid response campaign, and led a successful effort to expel extremist Rep. Nearman from the legislature after he illegally helped rioters break into the Oregon State Capitol.
- Our combined coalition presented briefings to over 100 organizations, businesses and legislators in both Georgia and Oregon, including a pre-election briefing to election protection partners in Georgia and a legislative briefing to 5 members of the Oregon state legislative delegation.

Success with this early coalition work led to the creation of SPLC's Exposing Extremism in Elections project.

Exposing Extremism in Elections [5]
Individuals who belong to extremist organizations or harbor extremist views employ a variety of strategies to influence mainstream society, one of which is running for public office. Once elected, these candidates can affect laws and public policy from the inside as a part of the political system. Using the data provided by the Exposing Extremism in Elections project, concerned voters, community leaders, political parties, public officials, and businesses can learn about the ideology of these candidates and the individuals they associate with.

The SPLC Action Fund has compiled a list of candidates running for office who appear to have ties to extremism. These ties take different forms – seemingly sympathetic retweets, endorsements, organization memberships or other indications of alignment with philosophies dangerous to participative democracy. We believe that providing this information to the public will expose the ties these candidates have to extremist groups or ideologies and contribute to an informed voter base.

The Exposing Extremism in Elections project provides information about extremist-tied candidates, new or incumbent, running for public office at local, state and federal levels. The project provides detailed information about the candidate, their election status and any apparent ties they have to extremist groups and/or ideologies. You will find candidates with apparent relationships to, or support from, both hate and antigovernment extremist movements, as well as an array of extremist groups and ideologies. Such candidates are running for all levels of office, across the U.S., and in almost every state – extremist-tied candidates are not isolated to any geographic area.

SPLC's Intelligence Project team used a standardized method to identify and compile the information in the Exposing Extremism in Elections data sets. The information comes from open-source materials and tips submitted to the Intelligence Project by the public and verified by our researchers. The candidate and election information available in the data sets was collected from publicly available election resources.

The candidates identified in these data sets as having extremist ties came to the Intelligence Project's attention during its regular monitoring and research of extremist groups and individuals. Once a candidate was identified as having potential ties to extremism, research analysts on the Intelligence Project team conducted further investigation into the nature of the candidate's associations. Based on the evidence collected, the Intelligence Project team determined whether the candidate's extremist affiliations met the definition of one of five "relationship type" categories:

- Leader: The candidate is a known leader of an extremist group, chapter or ideological movement.
- Member: The candidate is a known member of an extremist group, chapter or ideological movement.
- Former Member: The candidate is a known former member of an extremist group, chapter or ideological movement (Note: This does not refer to reformed extremists).
- Ideological: The candidate is not known to be a member or leader of an extremist group, chapter or ideological movement but their platform, rhetoric and/or behavior demonstrates agreement or alignment with specific extremist ideologies.
- Transactional: The candidate is not known to be a member or leader of an extremist group, chapter or ideological movement and does not have any known extremist views or ideologies; however, the candidate has engaged with an extremist group or ideological movement, potentially to benefit from this association (e.g., to gain votes).

These categories were created by the Intelligence Project team to describe the quality of the candidate's association with extremism. If a candidate met the threshold for one of the five relationship categories, they were included in the data set; if they did not meet the threshold for one of these categories, they were excluded from the data set.

The Intelligence Project team engaged in a peer-review process to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information presented in the Exposing Extremism in Elections data sets.

White supremacy – especially the dominance of white men holding power and privilege – is baked into the structural racism that undergirds American institutions and laws. Over the past few years, the "great replacement" narrative has become thoroughly mainstream on the political right and the central framework for the white supremacist movement. This racist conspiracy asserts a systematic, global effort to replace white, European people with nonwhite, foreign populations. It sees America's increasing diversity as a threat that must be countered in politics, in law, in court, in the media - and with violence. These beliefs have motivated terror attacks against Black and Brown communities and pose a profound threat to democracy.

Another anti-democratic movement impacting elections SPLC is monitoring is the resurgence of so-called parental rights groups. In the past, parents who objected to inclusive education removed their children from public school, but now they are keeping them in public school and electing far-right, anti-inclusion actors to local school boards in their push to determine the curriculum. Policies emerging from the parental rights movement tend to make schools less welcoming for LGBTQ+, religious and language minority students, and students of color more broadly.[6]

Over the past few years, many reactionary anti-student inclusion groups have risen across the country in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and an increased focus on equity and inclusion programs. They have also quickly fomented their place as part of the hard-right movement.

These groups continue to spread conspiratorial rhetoric, opposing what they consider to be indoctrinating public school curricula and plots by progressives to groom schoolchildren for sexual exploitation. They also seek legitimacy and mask hate speech by combining their vitriol with rhetoric that appeals to concerned parents.

Reactionary anti-student inclusion groups such as Moms for Liberty, Moms for America, Parents Defending Education that the SPLC lists as extremist groups are, by their very nature, responding to social progress that they dislike and have no control over. Like many other hard-right groups, these reactionary anti-student inclusion groups are constantly painting themselves as an oppressed class, while vilifying those discriminated against.

These groups denigrate lessons on diversity and inclusion. They spew homophobic and transphobic speech in the name of protecting their children's innocence, disregarding and disrespecting children in the LGBTQ community. They ban reading materials that they deem inappropriate, which almost always happens to be LGBTQ or non-white in subject matter. They embrace racist and nationalist ideology, claiming to want the teaching of America's accurate history in the schools but label the true, harsh history of the country as unpatriotic and unsuitable for children.[7] This movement of hard-right extremists has connected globally and recently sponsored speakers at the UN 5th Biennial Transatlantic Summit in New York. Many of the groups sponsoring the meeting have been designated by the SPLC as anti-LGBTQI.

To counter these growing threats, we must build a truthful, positive and compelling narrative that builds support for functional multi-racial democracy as the highest good and mainstream goal of an inclusive democracy. With robust anti-racist education, we can reduce the population of Americans that harbor sympathy for a white supremacist worldview. With a focus on prevention and pre-radicalization, we can spot warning signs and intervene earlier by supporting grassroots partners with tools and resources to empower Black and Brown people and make communities more resilient. By continuing to be a leading source of research and analysis, investing in the technology needed to track white nationalism and white supremacy across the digital frontier and exposing the dangers it creates for our democracy, we create an evidentiary basis for accountability. Armed with good data and a powerful narrative for systemic change, we will empower a multi-racial movement to push for systemic remedies through policy change, legislation, and structural reforms.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to present to the U.N. Forum on Minority Issues. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Endnotes

1. "Five-Year Strategic Framework". Southern Poverty Law Center, August 2022

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4. Daniel A. Cox, "Support for Political Violence Among Americans Is on the Rise. It's a Grim Warning About America's Political Future," American Enterprise Institute, 26 March 2021, www.aei.org/op-eds/support-for-political-violence-among-americans-is-on-the-rise-its-a-grim-warning-about-americas-political-future; Bartels, "Ethnic Antagonism Erodes Republicans' Commitment to Democracy"; Sonia Roccas and Marilynn B. Brewer, "Social Identity Complexity," Personality and Social Psychology Review 6 (May 2002): 86–102.

5. https://www.splcactionfund.org/projects/exposing-extremism-elections/about

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7. Maya Henson Carey, "Moms for Liberty Summit Injects Extremism into the Mainstream," Hatewatch, Southern Poverty Law Center, 29 June 2023 https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2023/06/29/moms-liberty-summit-injects-extremism-mainstream