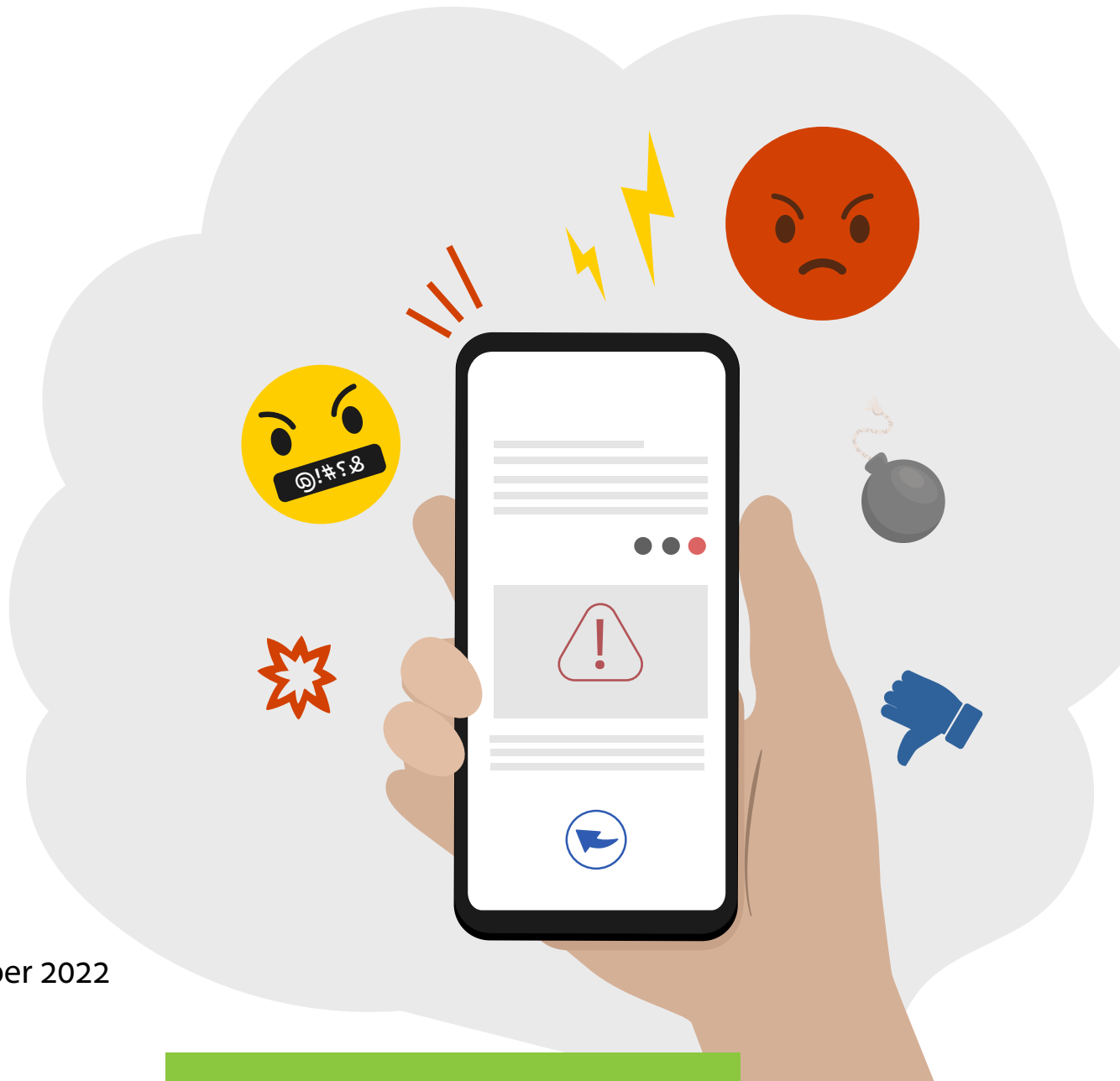




A Guide to Combating Online Hate Speech



Zamleh –The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement

Perceptions of Privacy and Personal Data Protection in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

A Guide to Combating Online Hate Speech

Authored by Ahmad Qadi

Revised and edited by Cathrine Abuamsha

Translated by: Ritaj for Managerial Solutions

Contact Us:

info@7amleh.org | www.7amleh.org

Tel: +972 (0)774020670

Find us on Social Media: **7amleh**    

Introduction

7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media presents this guide to shed light on prevalent online hate speech and possible ways to counter it in the Palestinian context. In addition to its crisp brevity, this reference gains further significance as it provides a clear definition of hate speech, presenting the relevant legal and human rights framework that entitles people to encounter this abusive form of expression. It also gives authentic examples and hands-on steps to address this form of intolerance, given its prevalence and the fact that a high percentage of social media users are exposed to various forms of abusive and hate speech.

Definition

Hate speech is any form of discriminatory or pejorative verbal or written discourse, communication, or content that expresses, encourages, flares up, or incites hatred against people or groups based on inherent characteristics or specific factors of their identity such as gender, race, color, nationality, religion, origin, or political opinion. In doing so, hate speech creates an environment of violence and social, political, and cultural rifts.

Hate speech is often manifest in generalizations and stereotypes, bigoted and discriminatory views, dehumanization, political gaslighting, and false representations in the media. In the Palestinian context, hate speech takes four forms: event-related hate speech, swinging hate speech (usually between political and gender), complex, identity-related, and institutionalized hate speech.¹

Although there is a world of difference between the two, hate speech is often confused with freedom of expression. While restrictions on the freedom of opinion are strictly prohibited under any circumstances, freedom of expression may not also be restricted as long as it respects the rights and reputations of others and does not violate the order of the public. Furthermore, any restrictions based on the said grounds must be carried out as provided by law and as necessary in a manner

1. P. 6, Hate Network: Hate Speech on Social Media Platforms in the Palestinian Context and its Impact on their Digital Rights, Nijmeh Ali, September 2021, 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media: <https://bit.ly/3RpqF7H>.

proportionate to the *raison d'être* of such limitations.² Hate speech, however, is any content or expression that goes beyond the bounds of the freedom of expression to advocate or stir up hatred and discrimination against specific groups, entities or individuals, unfolding many sociopolitical risks and threatening the well-being of individuals and communities as well as their rights to safety and freedom.

Legal Framework

Everyone has the right to equality, nondiscrimination, and protection, as guaranteed and enshrined by international human rights instruments. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the right to equality and nondiscrimination, and article 3 of the same declaration enshrines the right to freedom and security. Although the universal declaration does not directly address hate speech, as the concept was not common at the time the declaration was drafted, hate speech is primarily based on discrimination and incitement of violence and insecurity; two violations that are expressly prohibited by the universal declaration.

Furthermore, many provisions in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination prohibit and combat discriminatory and racist discourses. Articles 4 and 7 of the convention prohibit and counter all forms of racial hatred and discrimination. As article 5 stands, "[States parties] shall declare an offense punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another color or ethnic origin, and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof."

Similarly, article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides for the right to nondiscrimination and personal safety protection. Advocacy of hatred and racism is likewise prohibited by article 20(2) of the ICCPR: "Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law."

2. Article 19, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, December 16, 1966, United Nations: <https://bit.ly/3RCwgHV>.

In a similar national vein, article 9 of the 2003 Amended Basic Law prohibits discrimination, and article 24 of Decree No. 10 of 2018 on Cybercrime states: "Each person who creates an electronic website, application or account or disseminates information on the electronic network or a means of information technology with the intention of displaying any written words or conduct that may give rise to racist or religious hatred or racial discrimination against a particular group on the basis of its race, sectarian affiliation, color, appearance or disability shall be punished by either or both confinement for a term that is not more than one year and a fine of not less than two hundred Jordanian dinars and not more than one thousand Jordanian dinars or its equivalent in the legal currency of circulation."

More so, in 2012, the Human Rights Council asserted that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online,"³ meaning that all these provisions do apply to the violations and abusive practices against safety in cyberspace, including hate crimes.

Hate Speech in the Palestinian Context

According to a survey carried out by 7amleh, 85.7 percent of Palestinian respondents have been subject to hate speech on Facebook, and 71 percent believe that hate speech is prevalent among Palestinians on social media. While 36.9 percent of the respondents perceived the Occupation as a cause of hate speech on social media, 63.3 percent believe hate speech in the Palestinian context is driven by political events.⁴

In addition, 55.9 percent of respondents admitted that they would rather ignore hate speech on social media if they are exposed to it. Remarkably, 86.6 percent of respondents say hate speech on social media can lead to violence and attacks in the real world. A small percentage of respondents (23%) feel that social conventions and traditions incite hate speech and serve as a breeding ground for it. Last but not least, 60.3 percent believe that social media platforms' mechanisms are insufficient to deter hate speech.

3. Resolution (20/8), p. 30, paragraph 1, Report of the Human Rights Council on its Twentieth Session, United Nations, November, 14 2013, United Nations Document (A/HRC/20/2).

4. Hate Network.

Typical instances of hate speech include but are not limited to:

- A person or a group following a particular religion targets followers of another religion with takfiri (religion-based excommunicatory) posts or comments.
- A person or a group affiliated with a particular political party post content accusing followers or supporters of another party of treason and espionage.
- A person or a group commentscomment on a post about a crime against a woman or a girl to justify the crime and blame the victim.
- A person opposes the supporters of the accession to international human rights conventions and accuses them of immorality, especially those who advocate for the adoption of CEDAW.
- A person and a group accuse a girl of cuckoldry on the pretense of personal photos posted on social media.

The following manifestations are the most prominent forms of hate speech:

- Hateful calls/invocation of destruction and harm, e.g., "May God burn him/her" and "May God curse on him/her."
- Expressions of schadenfreude in relation to torture and murder cases, e.g., such as "You deserve it."
- Insults on discriminatory bases, e.g., "gangsters" and "combat boots."
- Accusations of immorality, e.g., "corrupt" and "Morally bankrupt."
- Accusations of treason and espionage, "collaborator," "traitor," and "mole."
- Takfiri comments, e.g., "infidel" and "religion dealer."
- Insult to intelligence, e.g., "stupid" and "humble."
- Mockery, e.g., laughing at content about a violent crime.
- Cuckoldry accusations, e.g., "degenerate," "prostitute," "lewd," and "pimp."
- Stereotyping, e.g., "Bedouin," "refugee camp-ster," "helter-skelter," "scrounger."

How to take action and combat online hate speech?

The following steps help you identify the severity of hate speech content and combat it:

1. Hate speech severity indicators:

- Who created the content: Is the hate speech content creator a public figure, an influencer, or just an ordinary person? Does the content creator have many followers?
- How widespread is the hate speech content: Is this type of hate speech widespread or limited? Did it get posted only once, or did it get shared a lot?
- Purpose: Is the content circulated to incite hatred and cause divisions?
- Content: How risky, if any, is the content? Does it implicitly or explicitly promote violence or incite hatred?
- Sociopolitical context: Is the political context ripe for bouts of violence due to this hate speech content? Is the hate speech content targeted against politically marginalized groups?⁵

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2. Principles of action:

- Pause and check whether the content advocates or stirs up hatred;
- Avoid responding in kind to hate speech;
- If doing so doesn't put your safety at risk, you should respond to hate speech with reason and argument;⁶
- Learn and educate others about hate speech;
- Document hate speech content.

5. The Final Draft of the Hate Speech Dictionary of Terms for Participants in the Seminar, November 23, 2019, Jordan Media Institute and the Ethical Journalism Network: <https://bit.ly/3AZ3Z8W>.

6. Engage - how to deal with hate speech? United Nations. Accessed on August 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3wBvsur>.

3. To document hate speech content, the following information needs to be collected:

- Victim's information: Victim's name, age, gender, geographical location, phone number, and email address for communication and victim profiling (e.g., individual activists, journalists, and academics).
- Hate speech instance information: On which platform did the violation occur? When did it occur (date)? What is the type of breach, the platform and content, as well as the context and format in which the content was posted?
- Violator's information: Violator's name, nationality (e.g., Palestinians, Israelis), username on the platform used to post the hate speech content, account type, link to the account of the violator, link to hate speech content, screenshot(s) of the content and the account.
- Documentation and follow-up information: date of notification, actions taken, and results.

4. How to collect this information?

- Take a screenshot of content, whether it is a comment, post, photo, or another form of content, provided that the screenshot shows the content itself and the name of the publisher;
- Copy and save content if it's text, and save it if it's a photo or a video;
- Click on the post time signature at the top of the content right below the username to copy and save the post link;
- Click on the username of the person who created the content to access their account and take a screenshot of it;
- Save the account link;
- Write down the username, email, if any, as well as the victim's name and information;
- Keep track of the date of the post and any affiliations of this posting person or group (e.g., are they Palestinians or Israelis?)

5. How to report hate speech on social media?

- Just click the "report" button next to the offensive content on the platform;
- File a complaint concerning the content with other watchdog platforms such as the Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or);⁷
- Lodge a formal complaint with the cybercrime police or prosecution.

6. The main measures taken by civil society organizations (SCOs) to counter hate speech:

- Monitor and document hate speech content;
- Send official requests to social media firms asking them to remove hate speech;
- Organize mass reporting campaigns against online hate speech content;
- Urge the relevant authorities to investigate and punish those responsible for creating and spreading hate speech;
- Provide psychological support to hate speech victims; and
- Raise public awareness of the nature and gravity of hate speech.

7. The Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or) is 7amleh's signature first open-source online platform to monitor, document and follow up on the digital rights violations of Palestinians (est. 2021): 7or.7amleh.org

Recommendations

- The public authorities should wield all the means to develop the necessary policies and legislation that protect freedom of opinion and expression, criminalize hate speech, and ensure accountability.
- The public authorities should take all appropriate measures to raise awareness about freedom of opinion and expression, distinguish these rights from the concept of hate speech, and raise awareness about its severity and ways to combat it, including through Palestinian education curricula at schools and universities.
- CSOs should organize awareness campaigns, training programs, and workshops to raise awareness about hate speech, its gravity, the need to tackle it—and how to do so.
- Human rights activists and groups, including digital rights organizations, should pressure social media corporations to offer human rights-compliant services and challenge and remove all forms of hate speech from their platforms, including hate speech aimed against Palestinians.
- Individuals should have access to practical and effective reporting procedures to report any content that incites hatred and violence.

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info@7amleh.org | www.7amleh.org

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