Situational Analysis Paper

Hate Speech and Its Implications on Civil Peace and Social Harmony

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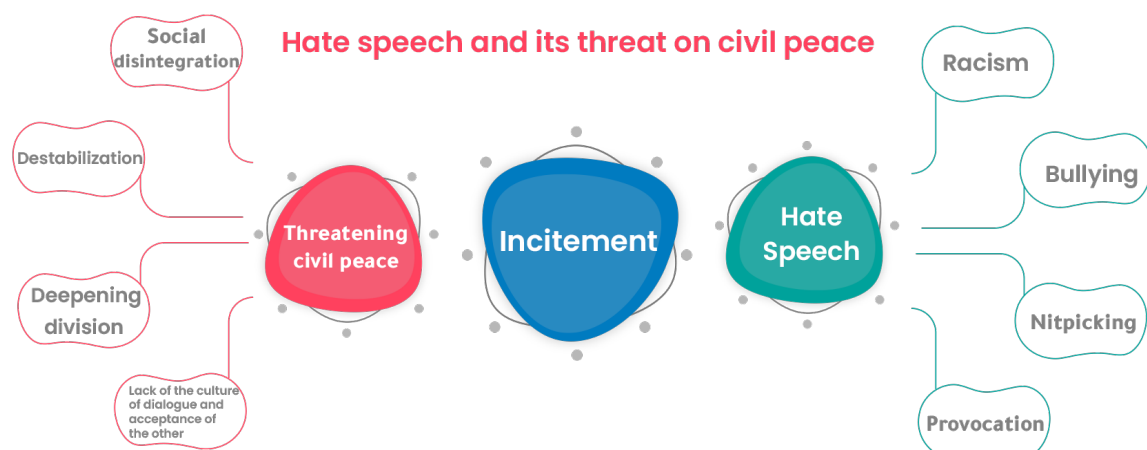# Hate Speech and its Implications on Civil Peace and Social Harmony

With all its details and components, hate speech threatens societies' civil peace, especially when we talk about violence-provoking incitement. This situation analysis paper aims at examining hate speech implications on civil peace and social harmony.

Hate Speech

Hate speech and incitment in local and international laws

- The United Nations' Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech defines hate speech as: "Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are," which threatens civil peace, according to the international human rights law.

- Cambridge Dictionary defines "incitement" as: "doing or saying something that encourages people to behave violently or illegally."

- In 1998, late President Yasser Arafat issued Presidential Decree No.3 on Perpetuating National Unity and Preventing Incitement. Article 1 of which states: "The following acts are illegal in all Palestinian governorates: incitement to racial discrimination, encouraging illegal acts of violence, insulting different religions […], forming illegal associations that practice or incite crimes, spoil the life, and incite the masses to make a change by illegal force or incite sedition."

Hate speech and its threat on civil peace

Social disintegration
Destabilization
Deepening division
Lack of the culture of dialogue and acceptance of the other

Threatening civil peace

Incitement

Hate Speech

Racism
Bullying
Nitpicking
Provocation

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To decide if a speech is hateful, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights identified a six-part threshold:

1. Context: When assessing if statements are likely to incite discrimination, hostility, or violence against the target group, analyzing context is key, as it may have a direct bearing on both intent and/or causation. The social and political context prevalent at the time the speech was made and disseminated should be taken into consideration.

2. Speaker: The speaker's position or status in society should be considered, specifically the individual's or organization's standing in the context of the audience to whom the speech is directed.

3. Intent: Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights anticipates intent. Negligence and recklessness are not sufficient for an act to be an offence under article 20 of the Covenant, as this article provides for "advocacy" and "incitement" rather than the mere distribution or circulation of material.

4. Content: The content of the speech is a critical element of incitement. Content analysis may include the degree to which the speech was provocative and direct, as well as the form, style, and nature of arguments deployed in the speech, or the balance struck between arguments deployed.

5. Extent of the speech act: Extent includes such elements as the reach of the speech act, its public nature, its magnitude, and the size of its audience.

6. Likelihood: The probability that the speech would succeed in inciting actual action against the target group should be identified, recognizing that such causation should be rather direct.

Hate speech

Individuals distinct between the group to which they think they belong and the "external group" and produce their hate speech within the "us versus them" conceptual framework, according to a study by researcher Khayriya Al-Omari. Speech that incites hatred towards the external group can be one of three main categories:

1. Dehumanization and demonization of the external group: Dehumanizing the external group involves ridiculing it.

2. Violence and incitement: Although dehumanization and demonization are based on categorizing groups of people in a very negative manner, they do not explicitly advocate violence against them. Another classification of hate speech involves incitement to violence.

3. Early warning: Mass hate speech rarely begins with dehumanization or incitement. There are signs that we can recognize early on to help prevent escalation into more aggressive language.
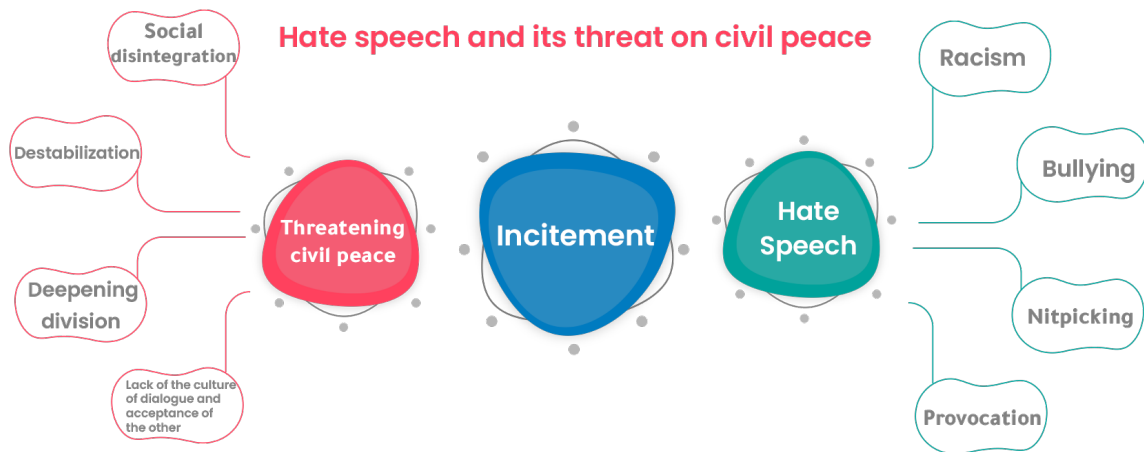
The absence of transparency and democracy atmosphere, along with the lack of permanent dialogue frameworks between the various components of society, constitute a fertile soil for hate speech growth. In Palestine, we cannot claim that we do not have hate speech, which has become disturbing and threatens with the emergence of complex conflicts causing division and internal insecurity. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, violence and social crime rates in Palestine have notably increased during the years of division. Although it is difficult to say that these rising rates are directly linked to inflammatory speech, they still involve some incitement-encouraged attacks, especially given the apparent turmoil and advocacy campaigns in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

According to the Human Rights Commission, hate speech is "any speech that spreads, incites, promotes, or justifies hatred, discrimination, or hostility against another person or group," which we have been witnessing during the years of the division, as there has been an increase in inflammatory statements and speeches. Hate speech can be detected and analyzed by applying the six-part threshold on the Palestinian society as follows:

Hate speech in the Palestinian society	The Context	Hate speech in Palestine comes in the context of the internal division, and its negative implications on all aspects of the life of the Palestinians. It can be observed on three levels:	The political level	Political program preferences and accusations of political failure and obstruction of the reconciliation.
			The Economic level	Accusations of cutting salaries and failure in the government. The societal groups' interests have changed in light of the political and economic dilemmas, financial crises, and Israeli attacks. As a result, the economic conditions have deteriorated. But instead of addressing them, some groups started to pin the blame on others using hate speech.
			The social and cultural level	The culture of division has prevailed in the Palestinian society, as political parties adopted different programs, tools, and means. The rest of the national movement is divided between Hamas and Fatah movements.
	The Speaker	Driven by political and religious differences, there is more than one category of Palestinian hate speech producers, including	Political figures:	Politicians and media spokespersons who constantly make hate speech through partisan media, and their supporters circulate it on social media.
			Student movement:	In their efforts to compete and impose their electoral programs in universities that hold student council elections, some student groups recklessly or ignorantly use hate speech. Some debates that took place in 2022 in West Bank universities are a clear example of this when they used hateful and inciteful words (such as "thugs") and accused the security services of betrayal.
			Israeli news	The Israeli media constantly spread misleading news that promote hate speech by publishing lies and shedding light on issues that would provoke negative interaction among the Palestinians.
	The Intention	Political parties seek to convince the public of their policies and programs using subjective and balanced speech—from their point of view. However, in light of the existing differences, some of their	Drawing attention	In their official and unofficial speeches, political figures nitpick their competitors, taking competitors' positions and words out of context, or bringing old events back to the surface to draw the public's attention, garner support for their political programs, and convince their supporters and the society.
			Nitpicking	Sometimes the intentions behind hate speech include nitpicking to deliver a message that "we are unlike the others."
			Provocation	Drawing attention and nitpicking lead to provoking the other party or the competitor

8		political speeches might be hateful, regardless of the intentions of the speaker.	to respond, leading to a vicious circle of nitpicking and responding.
			This ultimately leads to incitement and chaos. Social media users and youth usually rephrase hate speech into a more intense and extreme form that contains incitement against individuals, entities, and organizations.
	The Content	The content of the political and social speeches has clearly reflected hatred and incitement which included speeches in the context of the Palestinian division regardless of the speaker's intentions, especially in:	**Mass media**	- Partisan media use inflammatory terminology to describe rivals, including expressions such as ("rats", "militias", "shameful security services", and "herds" ...). - On a monthly basis, the Palestinian Anti-Hate Speech Network (Kafa) monitors hate speech, including insulting and inciting against women and the two governments in Gaza and the West Bank. - Social media platforms are the most widespread means for hate speech and incitement, especially with the use of "electronic flies".
			Society and youth:	- Incitement against women: Many forms of hate speech against women have been deducted including attacking laws supporting and protecting women's rights by claiming that they are against religion and social values. Governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions, and social figures also suffer hate speech. International conventions supporting women are described as "the convention of vice" and its supporters as "cuckolds." - Defaming figures running for elections.
	The Speech	The use of social media and modern technology have maximized the spread of hate speech in the Palestinian society.		
	The Likelihood	Repeated acts of violence, deteriorating security, and stability. The high prevalence of hate speech meets a rise in the cumulative violence rates in Palestine.		

After monitoring "hate speech and incitement" in the previous table, the expansion of hate speech and incitement in the Palestinian society has increased in certain periods such as local elections in the West Bank, student council elections, during and after reconciliation meetings. Likewise, hate speech turned from political to social as the inflammatory speech of the politically disagreeing parties affected all classes of the Palestinian society and intensified bullying.

Hate speech and the erosion of civil peace

Considering the political and societal turmoil that stimulates hate speech and incitement, civil peace is eroding, and various forms of internal conflict—advocated and justified with partisan propaganda's logic—are escalating. This ultimately leads to social fragmentation and weakens the legal guarantees that protect rights and freedoms including the right of freedom of expression. Although, due to its upbringing and historical culture, the Palestinian people had

always been united, mutually supportive, and able to face any phenomena affecting its internal security or aiming to shatter its internal unity.

With all its partisan and societal components, the Palestinian society has witnessed many different opinions on national and societal issues, but overall, all the differences had not violated the "culture of difference" and had not reached the point of division, hate speech, and incitement. During the past years, however, hate speech and incitement have increased due to a wide range of factors in the Palestinian society such as traditional and digital media, as well as headquarters, partisan platforms, and their supporters.

Reducing hate speech and bridging the gap between Gaza and the West Bank:

Reducing hate speech and promoting civil peace requires a counter-speech that rejects violence and incitement and promotes acceptance of the other within the framework of freedoms and the rule of law. The Palestinian society has been witnessing hate speech for many years, as media platforms have played a pivotal role in the interactions of societies, mainly regarding hate speech and incitement to violence. The more the media platforms are used to defend political interests or spread harmful stereotypes, the more conflicts and tragic consequences are exacerbated.

Analyzing these tools in light of Palestinian division, hate and incitement speeches have widened the gap between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Societal groups have become more vulnerable to hate speech. Failing to address hate speech would lead to crime and violence against groups or political parties and their supporters. Depending on the size of these parties, violence can affect the whole soc

What is supposed to be done in order to promote civil peace and reduce hate speech?	Reducing hatred-based violence and promoting civil peace without prejudice to the freedom of opinion and expression requires deterrent laws and procedures on the one hand and awareness on hate speech and its impact on the Palestinian society on the other. This requires a set of formal and informal policies and procedures.		
	On the political level	**The government**	• Activating legislations and decrees that stipulate punishment for incitement and hate speech crimes. • Defining hate speech in the Palestinian territories. • Coordinating work between official and unofficial institutions to reduce hate speech, and include it among prohibitions in the executive regulations of official institutions. • Activating control in government institutions and their media platforms to ensure that they are not involved in producing hate speech. • Educating the new generations, raising their awareness about civil peace and their role in achieving it, and enabling them to learn about hate speech, its motives, the conditions leading to it, and its repercussions, especially since they are the generation of technology and the social media world.
		Parties	Managing national online pages, monitoring hateful comments, and deleting them to limit their spread and impact (self-censorship).
	On the community and media organizations level	**Traditional media**	Concentrating on awareness raising and providing training on professional incitement free speech.
		Student movement	The Palestinian youth from all ideologies and backgrounds are the capital of Palestine. The student movement in the Palestinian universities should promote affiliation to the Palestinian cause and society instead of promoting hate in favor of partisan interests. "Partisan and ideological affiliation does not in any way necessitate depending on hate speech."
		Universities and academic institutions	They play a vital role in spreading the culture of dialogue and promoting civil peace among their students. But this requires promoting civil peace and the rule of law and avoiding bias towards one party or another.
		Civil society organizations	• Organizing workshops to raise awareness on the issues targeted by hate speech to reduce extremism and rising the awareness of groups (individuals or institutions) targeted by hate speech on how to handle hate speech. • Increasing initiatives that raise awareness against hate speech and promote civil peace.

12	On the popular level	Activating self-censorship tools	For individuals and families so that they are not dragged behind hate speech.
		Recognition awards	These awards can be given to the best-performing media outlets in terms of avoiding hate speech to encourage fighting hate speech and strengthen the values of tolerance and civil peace.

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