

# “NO HATE SPEECH”

**BUILDING TOGETHER  
A CULTURE OF  
HUMAN RIGHTS**



# SUMMARY

<b>1. CONTEXT</b>	4
<b>2. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK</b>	6
<b>3. POSITION PAPER</b>	12
<b>4. HOW TO RECOGNIZE HATE SPEECH AND HOW TO ADDRESS IT</b>	16
Elements of Hate Speech	18
A strategy to counteract and/or prevent hate speech	18
Don Bosco's legacy	20
"A point of goodness is accessible in every young person!"	21
Good practices	23
<b>5. SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION</b>	24



# 1

## CONTEXT

A disturbing groundswell of xenophobia, racism and intolerance is emerging worldwide, which includes a rise in anti-Semitism, in hatred towards Muslims as well as in the persecution of Christians. Social media and other forms of communication are being exploited as platforms for discrimination while the public discourse is often being utilized for political gain with rhetoric that stigmatizes and dehumanizes minorities, migrants, refugees, women and many so-called "others".

Hate speech represents a threat to democratic values, social stability, and peace, while silence in the face of this violation may constitute indifference to discrimination and intolerance, with an elevated risk of the most vulnerable segments of the population becoming

victims<sup>1</sup>. Hate is becoming 'mainstream'. Yet, tackling hate speech is crucial to preventing armed conflict, atrocity crimes and terrorism, ending violence against women and other serious violations of human rights, as well as promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies. In recent times, intolerance and hatred have increasingly featured in human society, as the internet has opened new ways of saying things and new avenues through which to convey them to more people<sup>2</sup>. On the one hand, the rise of the internet has expanded the possibilities for human interaction, providing the possibility to communicate with almost any other person worldwide. On the other hand, however, the ever-expanding world of online interaction has impacted negatively on many challenges human beings face in their real-world existence.

The rise in prejudice and intolerance can in many cases be linked to respective governments' own policies and communication strategies. Representatives of prominent political parties, public officials and, in some countries, even government ministers, have used derogatory language in their public communications, targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups, minorities, refugees and migrants. There is often a lack of political will to respond adequately and appropriately to instances of 'hate

<sup>1</sup> UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech Synopsis, Guterres, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, 2020.



**The rise in prejudice and intolerance can in many cases be linked to respective governments' own policies and communication strategies**

*speech*' surfacing in society at large<sup>3</sup>. The constraints on what can be said online, however, are fewer than those in the offline sphere, since things that no one would dare to say in public in the "non-virtual" world are rather more easily expressed through the internet. Hence, such ease of expression leads to an increase in bullying, cyberbullying, racist abuse and, to a wider extent, to discriminatory behavior.

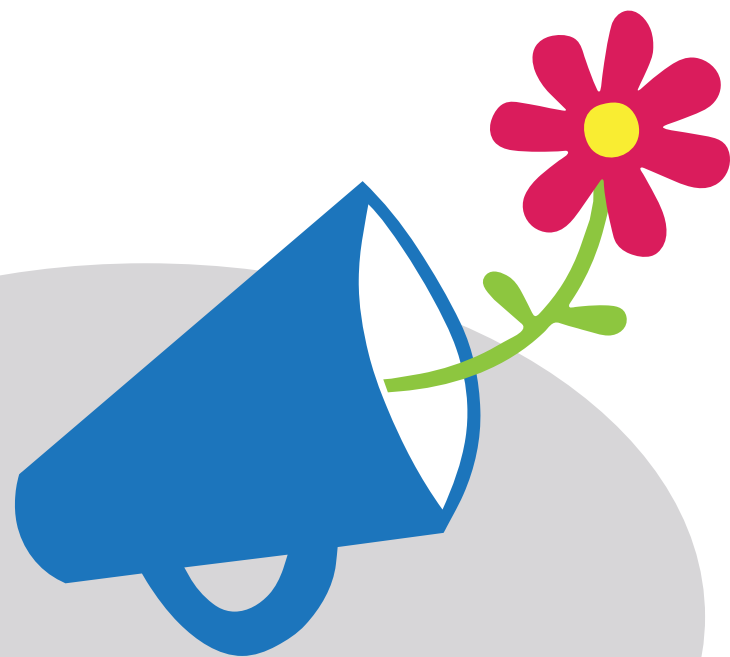
<sup>3</sup> Article 19, *Responding to 'hate speech': Comparative overview of six EU countries*, 2018; [https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ECA-hate-speech-compilation-report\\_March-2018.pdf](https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ECA-hate-speech-compilation-report_March-2018.pdf)

*Hate speech* is not always openly expressed and this makes it extremely difficult to control and to straightforwardly recognize. It is often the case that recognising *hate speech* requires *critical thinking*.

As a form of violence that violates human rights both offline and online, *hate speech* needs to be as far as possible prevented. Unfortunately, the increase in the use of digital tools and internet brought about by Covid-19 has had a correspondent impact on this issue.

### THE UN STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION ON HATE SPEECH (2020) 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, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor".



## 2 INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

With calls for limiting *hate speech* on the increase, international human rights law provides standards to govern States' and companies' approaches to online expression<sup>4</sup>. Rather than prohibiting *hate speech* as such, international law prohibits the incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence (referred to as 'incitement'). Incitement is an extremely dangerous form of speech because it explicitly and

<sup>4</sup> OHCHR, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, United Nations, 2019.

deliberately aims to trigger discrimination, hostility and violence, which may also lead to or include terrorism or atrocity crimes. Under international human rights law, the limitation of *hate speech* seems to demand a reconciliation of two sets of values: the democratic requirements of society to allow open debate and individual autonomy and development with the equally compelling obligation to prevent attacks on vulnerable communities and ensure the equal and non-discriminatory participation of all individuals in public life.

Freedom of expression, the right to equality and the obligation of non-discrimination are mutually reinforcing. Looking directly into some of the international standards universally accepted by the UN Member States, two Covenants provide some indications regarding this matter. *Article*

19 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* protects the right to hold opinions without interference and guarantees the right to freedom of expression. Since freedom of expression is fundamental to the enjoyment of all human rights, restrictions on it must be exceptional, subject to narrow conditions and strict oversight. Under *article 4* of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, States parties are obliged, inter alia, to: (a) "declare an offence 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 colour or ethnic origin"; and (b) "declare illegal and prohibit organizations, as well as organized and all other propaganda activities, which promote and incite racial discrimination, and shall recognize participation in such organizations or activities as an offence punishable by law".

In conclusion, on the one hand, addressing *hate speech* does not necessarily mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech, but rather taking action to keep it from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, however, it is easy to see how labelling some speech as

<sup>5</sup> Statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, 13th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues: Hate speech, social media, and minorities, Geneva, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26519&LangID=E>

## Human Rights systems in Europe, the Americas and Africa also articulate standards related to hate speech

*hate speech* can be an effective tool in silencing controversial views and shutting down debate. Speech that is referred to as *hate speech* may really be unpopular and offensive, but whether or not such speech should be criminally punished is another question altogether<sup>6</sup>.

Human Rights systems in Europe, the Americas and Africa also articulate standards related to hate speech. As far as

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Coleman P., *Censored. How European "Hate Speech" Laws are Threatening Freedom of Speech*, Kairos Publication, Wien, 2016, p. 6.





## In 2013 the Council of Europe launched the No Hate Speech Campaign aimed at combating hate speech and promoting human rights online

Europe is concerned, both the European institutions and the Catholic Church are committed to the challenge of preventing and raising awareness on this issue. The European Court of Human Rights in 2012



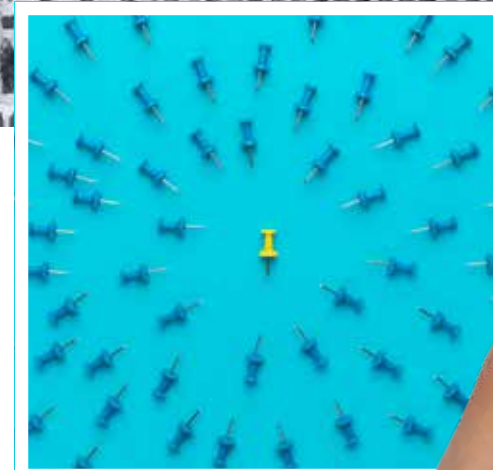
produced a factsheet conceding that there “is no universally accepted definition of the expression ‘hate speech’”, while explaining that “the Court’s case-law has established certain parameters making it possible to characterise “hate speech” in order to exclude it from the protection afforded to freedom of expression (Article 10) or freedom of assembly and association (Article 11)”<sup>7</sup>. In 2013 the Council of Europe launched the No Hate Speech Campaign aimed at combating hate speech and promoting human rights online. In addition, the European Commission monitors what is happening online through the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online which provides a robust response to this issue. Finally, the European Commission has been recently asking the EU institutions to include “hate crimes” and “hate speech” in the list of crimes on which the European Union can

<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe, *Factsheet – Hate Speech*, February 2012; <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4f39419d2.html>

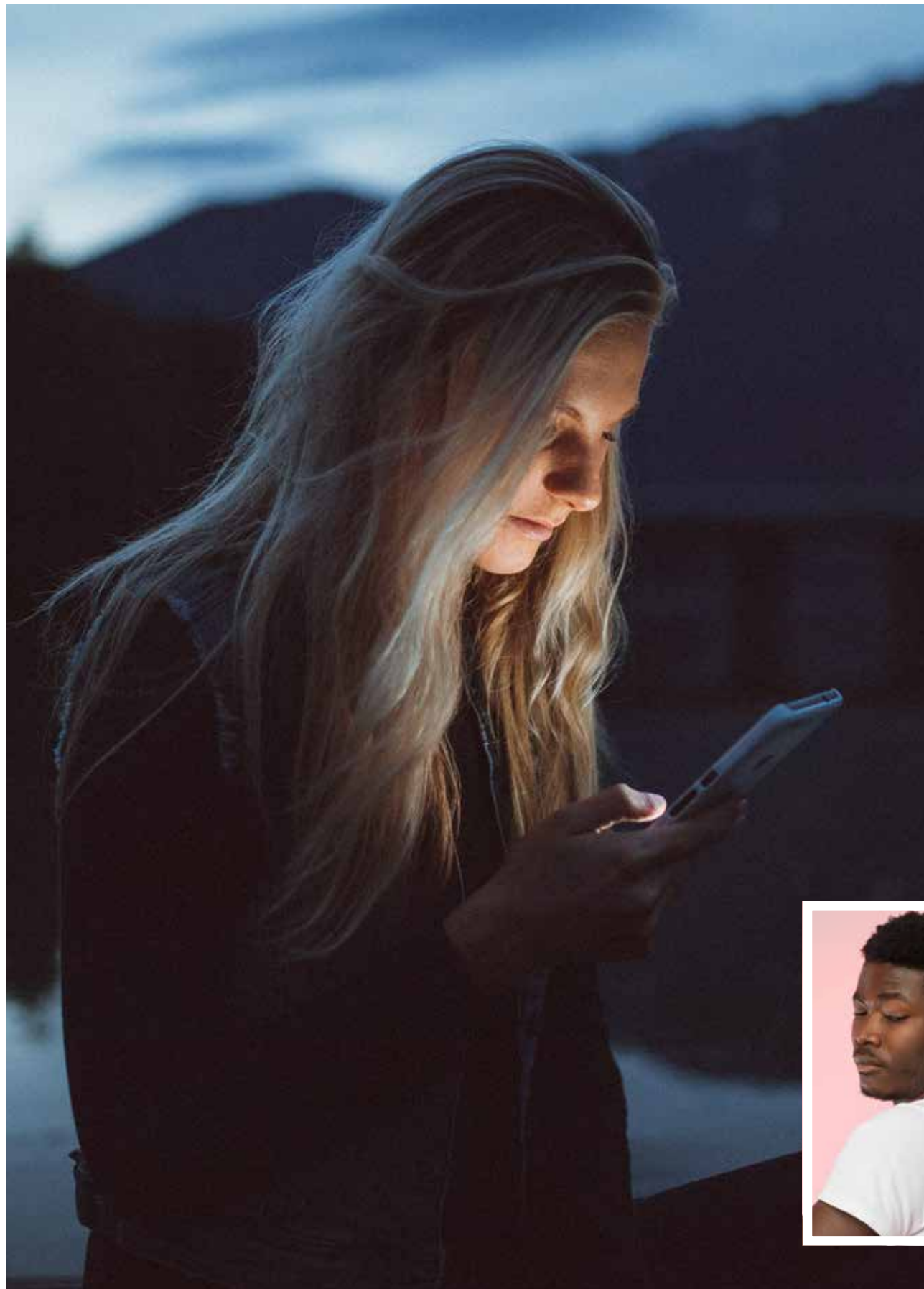
legislate<sup>8</sup>. However, considering the loose terminology referring to this phenomenon and the cultural diversity existing across EU Member States, we agree with COMECE that “the national level is the appropriate and better place to address related, highly sensitive questions, in accordance with respective legal traditions and approaches”<sup>9</sup>. For this reason, we also agree that an eventual inclusion of hate crimes and hate speech in the list of crimes on which the European Union can legislate, should be accompanied by elements such as the “inclusion of robust and not merely symbolic clauses to protect the fundamental rights to

<sup>8</sup> On 9 December 2021, the European Commission adopted a Communication on ‘A more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime’ which aims to trigger a Council Decision extending to hate crime and hate speech the current list of so-called ‘EU crimes’ as laid down in Art 83 TFEU. Such decision would enable the Commission, in a second stage, to strengthen the legal framework on tackling hate speech and hate crime across the EU.

<sup>9</sup> COMECE, “National level is best placed to fight against hate crimes”, press release 07/06/2021, <http://www.comece.eu/national-level-is-best-placed-to-fight-against-hate-crimes>





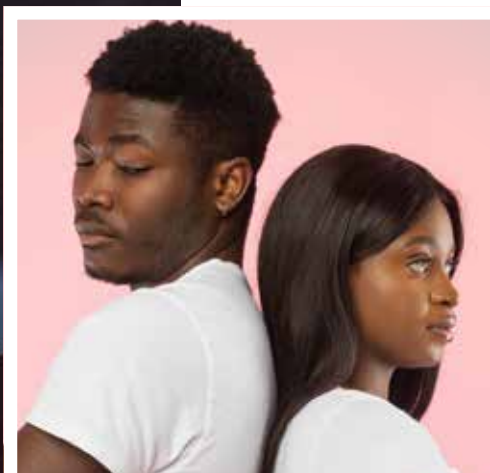


freedom of expression and information and to freedom of thought, conscience and religion"<sup>10</sup>. Preventing hate speech should not turn into "watered-down laicity" or "ideological colonization"<sup>11</sup>: it should, instead, enable us to build a culture of human rights built on the respect of human dignity, on the uniqueness of each person, culture and country, and an appreciation for the richness of diversity.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Francis, *Apostolic Journey to Cyprus and Greece. Press Conference on the Return Flight to Rome*, 6 December 2021.

In his 2020 Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (FT), Pope Francis has recognized the fact that many people nowadays are facing a "shameless aggression": "hostility, verbal abuse, mistreatment, defamation and verbal violence have found unparalleled room for expansion through computers and mobile devices" (FT 44). His message is a strong call to fraternity in response to this challenge. Far from endorsing views promoting just one form of thought across the world, we are called instead to work towards a new "cultural covenant, one that respects and acknowledges the different worldviews, cultures and lifestyles that coexist in society" (FT 219).



**Pope Francis has recognized the fact that many people nowadays are facing a "shameless aggression"**

# 3 POSITION PAPER

This *Position Paper*, especially addressed to DBI's partners and stakeholders in the education of children and young people in Europe, wishes to contribute to a reflection on the issue of *hate speech* and the human rights violations with which it is closely connected, even more so nowadays when the narrative and perception of reality are strongly impacted by technology.

As members of the Salesian Family, we have been entrusted with the heritage Don Bosco bequeathed to young people for their education, oriented towards their integral human development. This Paper looks ahead, embracing a Human Rights-based approach without denying the existing conflicts. At the same time, it recognizes the need to contribute to the development of a good process of reconciliation among today's young people, where active coexistence and fraternity can positively contribute to building a better world for all.

Hence, the role of educators, teachers and parents is essential, including that of the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDBs) in their action in favour of children and youth. At the same time, not all of these actors always possess the digital competences and expertise to perceive what is really happening online. This implies that some of them, despite their being particularly good educators in the "offline world", may happen to assume online some contradictory behavior that may indeed lead to discriminatory attitudes possibly resulting in human rights violations.



The role of educators, teachers and parents is essential, including that of the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDBs) in their action in favour of children and youth





**As members of the Salesian Family, we have been entrusted with the heritage Don Bosco bequeathed to young people for their education, oriented towards their integral human development**



Therefore, it is rather important to support Salesian educators and animators to translate their significant knowledge about education in the "offline" world similarly into the virtual world: to support them and make them consistent with this new "onlife" dimension.

#### DEFINITIONS OF "ONLIFE"<sup>12</sup>

Our lived experience of 'ever-increasing' pervasiveness of information and communication technologies. The set of actions and relationships that a person performs and has when he/she is both connected and disconnected.

This rise in violence is also a consequence of the loss of our ability to express ourselves, our ability to dialogue with each other. The less we know how to express ourselves, the more we become aggressive. This is especially true in the framework of a global market based on an ongoing competition. The increasing

pervasiveness of algorithms, artificial intelligence and profiling systems is isolating young people in bubbles or echo-chambers, and indirectly contributing to processes of radicalization. Educators must partner with those technicians who are developing such digital tools, in order to address these educative and ethical issues through the very design of these systems.

Finally, we cannot leave out parents and families when attempting to address this issue. They are "indirect beneficiaries" of this educative effort, as young people and, above all, children learn and assimilate from the very beginning of their life, and in particular, from their family environment. Parents and families are irreplaceable partners in the education of children and young people.



<sup>12</sup> FLORIDI, L. (ed), The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era, Springer Open, Oxford, 2015.



# 4 HOW TO RECOGNIZE HATE SPEECH AND HOW TO ADDRESS IT

S

Some examples of *hate speech* can be found in the media, above all in the headlines of some newspapers, where one may wonder to what extent their authors are conscious of the discriminatory meaning that is hidden behind what is written. This is rather alarming since the apparent intent of mass media is to 'normalize' this violation by writing

sentences that, while at first glance appear to be neutral, once analyzed are then proven to hide discriminations. Fake news and post-truth are also increasingly polluting the public debate in our societies. Hence it is becoming increasingly important to develop an ability for *critical thinking* in children and young people, as well as among educators, parents, animators, youth workers and Salesian religious. All in all, critical thinking can also be understood as the pillar of "reason" of Don Bosco's Preventive System.

*Critical thinking* entails the capacity to think clearly and rationally; it includes the ability to engage in reflective and

independent thinking. A person with *critical thinking* skills should be able to:

- Understand the logical connections between ideas;
- Identify, construct and evaluate arguments;
- Detect inconsistencies and mistakes in reasoning;
- Solve problems systematically;
- Identify the relevance and importance of ideas;
- Reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Lau J., *An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Creativity: Think More, Think Better*, Wiley, 2011.



In addition to this, it is worth reflecting on the fact that children bring their digital lives and experiences to school with them and it is the duty of the educators to assimilate this new reality into the





school and education systems. For this reason, it is important to provide children and young people with the digital skills to be able to face anything the virtual world deals them. This is crucial if we want every child and young person to become a truly responsible global citizen and a promoter of a culture of human rights.

Elements of Hate Speech

For “hate speech” to exist, three separate elements must be concurrently present<sup>14</sup>:

- a. Communication (speech, writing or behaviour);
- b. Attacks, or use of pejorative language;
- c. Reference to one or more identity factors.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. Detailed Guidance on Implementation for United Nations Field Presences, September 2020.



A strategy to counteract and/or prevent hate speech

As *hate speech* is often rooted in, and generates, intolerance and hatred, it is important not to underestimate the risk of such Human Rights violations and to address them with the following specific actions<sup>15</sup>:

1. Monitor and analyse *hate speech*;
2. Address *hate speech* root causes, drivers and actors;
3. Engage and support *hate speech* victims;
4. Convene relevant actors;
5. Engage with new and traditional media;
6. Use technology;
7. Use education as a tool for addressing and countering *hate speech*;
8. Foster peaceful, inclusive and just societies to address the root causes and drivers of *hate speech*;
9. Engage in *advocacy*<sup>16</sup>;
10. Promote positive narratives to spread the richness of diversity.

In such a difficult context, where human relationships are distorted by preconceptions and prejudices, young people find themselves growing up in a dominant culture where individualism and the “self” are central. The situation of others, the meaning of things and the realities that are “distant” are seldom considered. Hence, a more incisive and

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Don Bosco International, *Advocacy from a Salesian perspective*, Position Paper, 2018, available at: <http://donboscointernational.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Folleto-Advocacy-A5-INGLES.pdf>



collective educative proposal is needed, one which is focused on today’s reality and capable of recalling Don Bosco’s thinking to respond adequately to the great educative emergencies of present times.

Don Bosco’s legacy

In this condition and coherently with Don Bosco’s legacy, we have an evident duty and responsibility to educate all to promote and protect human rights for a







better society. His teachings and example challenge us to co-create a mentality of commitment, responsibility and action where it matters. Accordingly, we educate children and young people to promote and uphold human rights as an honest, active and responsible dimension of citizenship. With the person and his/her dignity placed firmly at the center, relationships based on justice and dialogue become possible and this is pivotal to our Salesian engagement with human rights issues.

Don Bosco left us a wonderful synthesis for integral education in the binomial "good Christians and upright citizens". Today we can readily rephrase this as "good Christians are honest citizens". His other fundamental teaching was that: we cannot live unless inserted in the context in which we live; and this integrates well with Christ's teaching that our feet should always be "firmly planted on the ground and our gaze turned to the sky".

## The Salesian way of educating assumes a horizon and a sense of life oriented towards happiness, already in the present moment

Don Bosco's Preventive System involves the whole person of the educator and the community to which he or she belongs, together with the young people<sup>17</sup>.

The Salesian way of educating assumes a horizon and a sense of life oriented towards happiness, already in the present moment. Don Bosco was convinced that cheerfulness and happiness are the expression of a constructive pedagogical relationship, a cordial relationship between the educator and the young person. Moreover, in every Salesian work, the Preventive System is assumed as a pedagogical path by all those who constitute the educational community and who thus assume the responsibility of making themselves actively present among the young. The three pillars of the Preventive System are commonly expressed as *reason*, *religion*, and

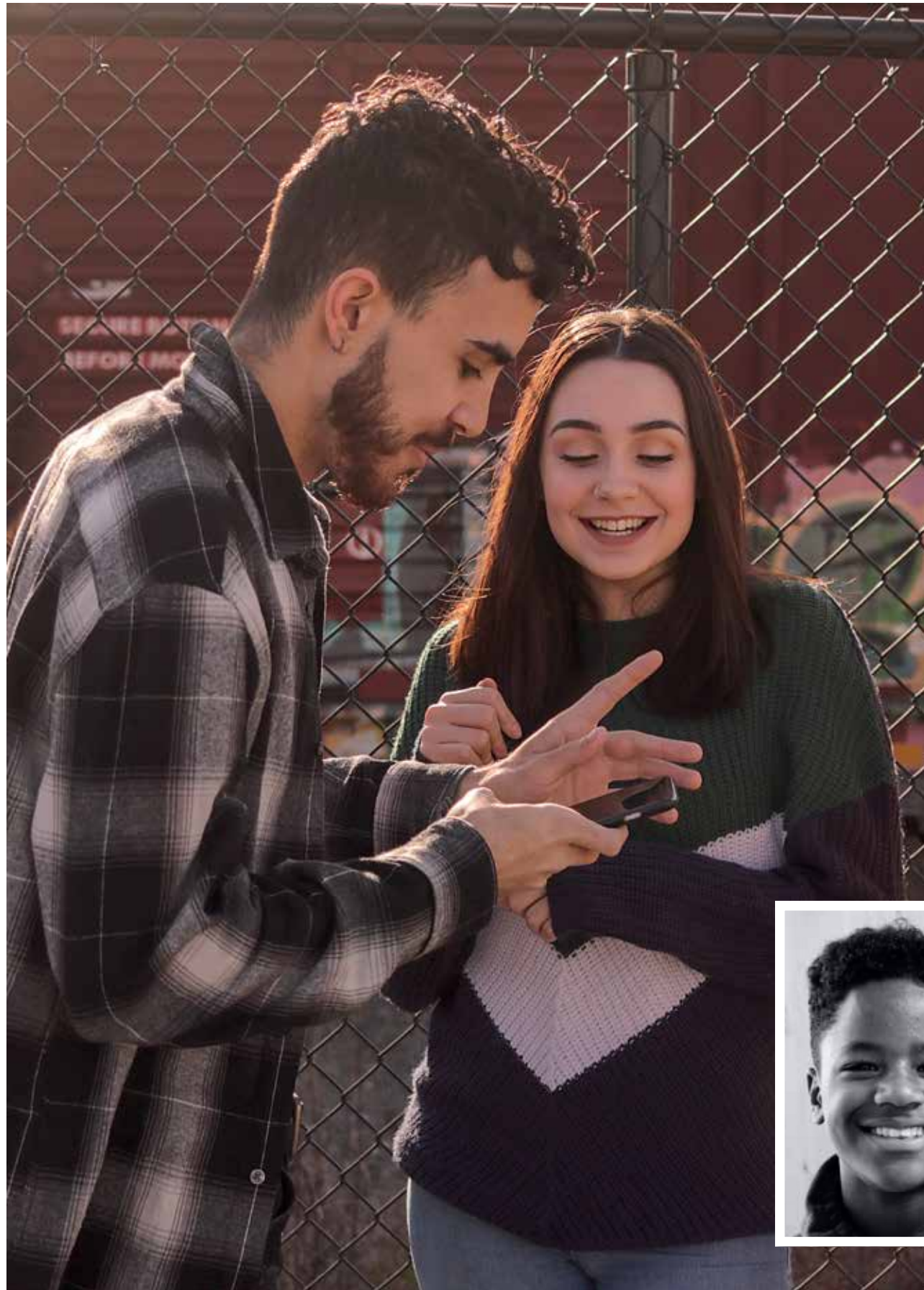
*loving kindness*. These were an original synthesis of the elements necessary for the integral development of young people: be it physical, intellectual, moral, social, religious or affective. From a methodological point of view, they set in motion a series of educational interventions to help young people develop their potential. Only by educating young people in this way can we aspire towards a better society, one in which human rights are effectively promoted, upheld and enjoyed in all their richness.

**"A point of goodness is accessible in every young person!"**

Linking our consistent educational heritage with the present challenge of counteracting and containing the consequences of *hate speech*, the pedagogy of the Salesians aims at anticipating and pre-empting, thus "preventing" this violence from even happening. Don Bosco's *Preventive System* is grounded in the belief that a

<sup>17</sup> SDB Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, Third Edition, 2014, p. 90.





point of goodness is accessible in every young person, and that anticipating a positive example through quality education is preferable to correcting a negative behaviour. Such a belief opens up a hopeful view of people and society. Hence, rather than just countering *hate speech*, Salesian educators are called also to change the way these issues are addressed by bringing forth *a Human Rights-based approach* which also takes into consideration the indications put forward by the standards and frameworks suggested by international human rights legislation.

#### Good practices

A plethora of good practices have been developed in this field by the Salesian Family. Among these, we can mention the “*Somos más*” (“We are more”) initiative, carried out since 2018 by the Google Corporation, together with the Spanish government and other institutions and NGOs, including “*Misiones Salesianas*” and “*Jóvenes y Desarrollo*” Foundation.



Thousands of children and young people have actively participated in this project, aimed at providing capacity building and awareness raising for those persons who intend to build a new offline and online narrative in society, and who contrast greatly with the people who still practice hate speech and violence.

Between 2021 and 2022, *Salesiani per il Sociale APS* (Italy) implemented the “*ReDI*” (“Responsabilità Digitale” – Digital Responsibility) project, with the contribution of the Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, reaching out to hundreds of adolescents with initiatives raising awareness on cyberbullying and youth agency to prevent it.

Another example is the campaign “*Jóvenes en positivo*” (“A positive view of youth”), launched in Spain in 2022 by the *Coordinadora Estatal de Plataformas Sociales Salesianas*, the *Confederación de Centros Juveniles Don Bosco*, *Escuelas Salesianas*, *Misiones Salesianas*, the ONGD *Jóvenes y Desarrollo*, *Bosco Global* and the Salesian Youth Ministry National Center of Spain. This campaign aimed to challenge the image of young people that has formed in society, and to show that youth are active and generators of change and transformation. Indeed, during the pandemic, a great burden of responsibility was placed on young people. Adults often blamed them for the spread of the disease, for a lack of solidarity and for being irresponsible, but little was said about the consequences that the pandemic was having on young people, their difficulties or their involvement. To this end, a series of articles written by young people on the issues that concern them have been disseminated. In addition, the campaign featured a WhatsApp Series, “*Ahora tú*”, consisting of 12 episodes of 90 seconds in which the lives of two young people were told: how the pandemic affected them, their relationships at school and how they faced their future.



# 5 SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION



- **Apply the Preventive System to the digital world too:** provide all our stakeholders with trainings on how to prevent uneducated attitudes on the internet. These initiatives may integrate what is already being done in other educational areas, adapting the Preventive System to the "onlife" condition, by developing adequate methodologies and capacity building.



- **Let young people participate in creating different and positive narratives.** Young people are neither just the victims, nor just the perpetrators of *hate speech*. They can be, and often are, agents of change among peers and adults. Their regard, their perspective, their dreams, aspirations and beliefs, including their faith, can guide them to innovative approaches towards new and positive narratives.



- **Get parents and families involved in this endeavor:** families and parents are not just the recipients of education. They can be, and sometimes are, partners of quality education. They must be provided with tools and trainings enabling them to cooperate with educators and youth workers in tackling this challenge.



- **Develop trainings on critical thinking:** such trainings may also include the debunking of fake news and the verification of sources of information.



- **Encourage the Salesian Family to use a Human Rights-based approach** in speeches and actions both offline and online.



- **Live "fraternity" and "active coexistence",** which is more than the passive concept of mere tolerance, and bring both concepts to the digital world too.

With these suggestions, *Don Bosco International* finally invites all the actors involved in education to **join forces** in this common challenge, **building together a culture of Human Rights**. In the wake of the Global Compact on Education launched in 2019 by Pope Francis, we are committed to "a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding", together with all those actors willing to "form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity"<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Francis, *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, 12 September 2019.









**DBI**  
DON BOSCO  
INTERNATIONAL