

CENTRE FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT (CEPAD)
1ST ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON CURBING HATE SPEECH IN NIGERIA’S
PUBLIC SPACE

COMMUNIQUE

PREAMBLE

The Centre for Peace and Development (CEPAD) of Veritas University, Abuja held the maiden edition of its Roundtable Discussion Series on Wednesday, 18th July, 2018 at the Basement Hall of the University Chapel. With the plethora of fake news that has taken center stage with the emergence of social media, CEPAD deemed it fit to appraise the consequences and likely implications of this phenomenon in the Nigerian society. One of such implications is the re-emergence of hate speech in Nigeria’s public space. It is in line with this that CEPAD decided to focus on hate speech, especially with the recent conflicts that have plagued Nigeria in recent times. Hence, the theme of the Roundtable Discussion: ***“Curbing Hate Speech in Nigeria’s Public Space”***. The Vice-Chancellor of Veritas University, Prof. Michael Kwanashie acknowledged the need to discuss the role of emerging technologies and fake news, and the growing menace of inciting public speech. The occasion also included the unveiling of PACEM: Journal of Peace and Development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The objectives of the first edition of the Roundtable Discussion are as follows:

- i) Appraise the operational definition of hate speech in its entirety, especially as enshrined in Nigeria’s legal jurisprudence.
- ii) Identify clear incidences or cases of hate speech in Nigeria.
- iii) Identify means of eradicating hate speech from Nigeria’s public space.

PARTICIPANTS

The Vice-Chancellor of Veritas University, the Principal Officers, the Management and other members of the University Senate; Traditional Rulers from the community; representatives of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN); representatives of various Media Organizations including Radio Nigeria, Guardian Newspaper, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Catholic Television, Goodshepard, National Union of Journalists, Africast, Jordan FM; representatives of various Civil Organizations including CAFOD; representatives of security agencies such as the

Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Department of State Security (DSS); students and the University Community.

DISCUSSANTS

The Discussants at the Roundtable were:

1. Mr. Clement Nwankwo, Executive Director, Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, Abuja.
2. Mr. Martins Oloja, Editor in Chief, Guardian Newspaper.
3. Prof. Mngumber Vicky Sylvester of the Department of English, University of Abuja.
4. Elder (Mrs.) Justina Mike Ngwobia.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Hate speech was described to include spoken words that are offensive, and are also unfair comments capable of inducing animosity. It is found in our public life and may spring from religious, ethnic or political biases.

There are pieces of legislation that target hate speech. Amongst such laws include sec. 59, 88A of the Criminal Code and sec. 416-417 of the Penal Code which deals with false news with intent to cause fear, alarm the public and provoking breach of peace by offensive publication; sec. 95 and 96 of the Electoral Act 2010 on political campaigns and use of language that hurt tribal, religious and/or sectional feelings; sec. 24 and 26 of the Cyber Crime Act, 2015 which specifically address bullying, threats and harassment amongst others.

The rights of citizens to criticize government on its lack of responsibility and accountability does not amount to hate speech, for the right to hold government accountable is safeguarded by section 38, 39 and 40 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended).

Hate speech has the tendency to transform to hate action and this is unhealthy for the Nigerian polity.

The consequences of hate speeches are evident in the Agricultural sector of the Nigerian economy. This is seen in the cost implication of food items in the market as a result of farmers who have abandoned their farmlands due to the farmers/herdsmen conflicts.

Hate speech presently poses a severe threat to our national unity in Nigeria. Hence hate speech is a constitutional issue and the debate on it needs to be properly discussed.

With the emergence of social media that has almost taking over the mainstream traditional sources of news, there is an urgent need for a framework to guard its usage in Nigeria.

The blessings of technology can also be a curse. This is especially so if there are no regulations clearly defined to moderate the usage of smart phones in spreading unverified messages and (fake) news on social media platforms.

Hate speech should not be mistaken for free speech. In our quest to find peaceful resolution to conflicts there is need to juxtapose this with justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We call for action by government officials to curb the use of provocative words or language in their speech and activities.
2. We call on government to be honest when addressing issues of public interest so as to build up trust and integrity with the citizens.
3. We call for action for media houses (print and electronic) to eradicate hate speech in news reporting.
4. We call on the Ministry of Education to introduce into our schools of learning (primary, secondary and tertiary) curriculum that address the consequences of hate speech.
5. We call for action by government to change its mode of operation in the tackling of communal clashes in Nigeria by tagging and describing conflicts by their true nature and not giving them the usual rhetoric as communal clashes.
6. We call on the national orientation agency to be alive in its mandate as an agency of national unity to carryout civic enlightenment campaigns to eradicate hate speech and promote national unity.
7. We call on political party leaders to also promote national unity by toning down the language used in their campaigns so as not to overheat the polity.
8. We also call on security personnel to be fair, just and firm in discharging their duties.

Rev. Fr. Dr. Innocent Jooji
Director
Centre for Peace and Development
(CEPAD)