

Countries must boost measures to combat Internet racism – UN independent expert



Special Rapporteur on racism Mutuma Ruteere. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

5 November 2012 – The surge in websites that promote hate speech and racism requires States to implement measures to combat online extremism without curbing freedom of speech, a United Nations independent expert said today.

“The increase of extremist hate websites, the use of the Internet and social media by extremist groups and individuals to propagate hate speech and incite racial violence, and the increased

number of incidents of racist violence and crimes prompted by racist content on the Internet remain to be addressed, despite the adoption of positive measures,” the Special Rapporteur on Racism, Mutuma Ruteere, told the General Assembly in New York, during the presentation of two reports, one on racism on the Internet and the other on extremist political parties, movements and groups.

In relation to his report on racism on the Internet, Mr. Ruteere called for greater cooperation on this issue among governments, international bodies, the private sector, civil society and local communities, and stressed that a cohesive approach developed through dialogue is needed.

In particular, he noted that States should adopt legislative measures that examine the link between manifestations of online racism and hate crimes committed.

“Additional measures such as self- and co-regulatory initiatives developed by service providers and other relevant actors may also be useful in making efforts more effective,” Mr. Ruteere said.

“I believe that a possible way of countering racism on the Internet is through content diversification, in particular by promoting local content,” he added, inviting States to adopt policies and strategies to make the Internet widely accessible and affordable to all. “Education about racist content on the Internet and awareness raising measures are also important tools.”

However, the Special Rapporteur emphasized that any measures taken to counter online racism should not limit the right to freedom of expression and opinion and should comply with international human rights law.

“Any restrictions, control and censorship of the content disseminated via the Internet should be done on a clearly defined legal basis and in a manner that is necessary, proportionate and compatible with States’ international human rights obligations including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,” he stated.

Mr. Ruteere’s report on extremist political parties, movements and groups urges States to adopt the necessary legislation to protect vulnerable groups who are victims of racist and xenophobic attacks.

“A comprehensive approach based on a solid legal framework is essential,” he told the General Assembly when presenting the report.

He also encouraged States to strengthen awareness-raising activities aimed at fostering tolerance, to sensitize youth on the dangers of ideologies and activities of extremist groups, and to strengthen governments’ capacity to address racist crimes through human rights trainings.

“Cooperation with all the relevant actors, including civil society, is crucial to effectively prevent the rise and dissemination of extremist ideologies based on racial superiority,” he said, adding that political leaders and parties have the responsibility to condemn and refrain from disseminating messages that scapegoat vulnerable groups and incite racial discrimination.

Independent experts, or special rapporteurs like Mr. Ruteere, are appointed, in an honorary capacity, by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[Homophobic bullying represents grave violation of human rights – Ban](#)