

ADDRESSING HATE SPEECH IN RELIGIOUS SPACE:

A policy Brief



Centre for Information
Technology and
Development

www.citad.org

**ADDRESSING HATE SPEECH IN RELIGIOUS SPACE:
A POLICY BRIEF**



**CENTRE FOR INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY AND
DEVELOPMENT**

December, 2017

PREFACE

Economic crises and a set of complex political dynamics in the country are throwing up new challenges to the unity and social cohesion in Nigeria. Divisive discusses have taken over the air. Rumours calculated to cause confusion and unleash conflicts are daily dose of the social media in particular. But even more frightening is the increasing spade of hate and dangerous speech that suffices all the media channels. The hate and dangerous speech we see is largely grounded in religious and ethnic narratives. All of a sudden, hate and dangerous speech has expanded from the media channels of politicians and has entered places of worship where religious leaders are preaching hate and inciting their followers to kill. The dangers of dangerous speech are not far-fetched. We have seen how hate speech has led to mass killings in a number of countries already. In our country at the moment, hate and dangerous speech is woven around specific community and religious conflict making it difficult to address the problem, resulting in the killings of many people. Nigeria cannot be isolated from the possible consequences of allowing hate speech to be key feature of our communication. More than any time before, the country is challenged to find bold and effective strategies to curb dangerous speech in our communication realm.

Over the last two year, CITAD has been engaged in monitoring and countering dangerous speech in the country. While the campaign has been very useful in terms of neutralizing the possible consequences of some dangerous speech and inoculating the population against the dangers of been provoked by dangerous speech, we feel that as a nation we have not taken this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

Government has not addressed itself to uncovering and addressing the key drivers of dangerous speech in the country some of which are the making of the government itself. Without addressing these drivers of hate speech, strategies of curbing it cannot be effective. Government has not sought to rally round different stakeholders to join a well defined agenda to curb hate speech in the country.

We studied the nature and pattern of hate and dangerous speech in the media that our dangerous speech monitoring observatory has collected over the last two years and came up with what we think are the key drivers of hate speech in the country. On the basis of this, we have offered a number of suggestions on what different shareholders should do to address the problem.

It is our hope that this policy brief which is one of a series which synthesizes these findings and present appropriates recommendations would not only help in growing the attention of policy makers and other critical stakeholders to urgently join the effort to curb hate speech in our country, but also provide government with clear tools with which it has to lead the campaign and action to rid our country of hate and dangerous speech and hence move us towards a more peaceful and socially cohesive society.

CITAD would like to acknowledge and thank MacArthur Foundation for supporting the dangerous speech project and providing resource for the publication of this policy brief among other publications. We thank our team of dangerous speech monitors who daily keep us informed about what dangerous speech is being spread in our various communication channels as well as the countering team who work to naturalize dangerous speech in the media. We thank also all those who have in one way or the other contributed in the production of the policy brief.

Y.Z. Ya'u,



Executive Director, CITAD

INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, consistently every month religious-based hate speech topped the tally from our hate speech observatory. By the close of 2016, we had over 2603 items out of a total of 6258 captured during the year. This represents 42% of the total hate speech observed in the social media. By November 2017, the cumulative total of religious-based hate online as reported by our monitors in the platform was 2420 against a total of 5677, representing about 43%. Obviously religious based hate speech therefore, is the second major category of hate speech circulating in the social media, coming after ethnicity-based hate speech.

While all hate speech discriminates against other people as a group, religious-based hate speech discriminates and endangers people on the basis of their faith. In the context of Nigeria religious-based hate speech finds expression in the form:

- Insults people on the basis of their religion
- Abuses or desecrates symbols of cultural or religious practices
- Denigrates or otherwise ridicules traditional or cultural institutions of other people
- Deliberate spread of falsehood or rumors that demeans or maligns, or otherwise ostracizes other people on the basis of religion

Although our monitoring was limited to online spaces, it is important to remember that online conversations are often the reflection of offline conversions. In other words, the online hate speech reflects what exists offline.

Religious-based hate speech makers include both religious leaders and ordinary adherents of the religions who trade out these viles for a variety of reasons. This genre of hate speech is spread from religious places of worship such as churches, mosques and shrines as well as in secular places such as markets, political rallies, community halls, schools, etc.

More than any type of hate speeches, religious-based hate speech tends to be more explosive and its propensity to catalyze violence higher. During the year, we have seen how such issues as blasphemy allegation or even minor misrepresentation or misinterpretation of a religious concept have led to violence clashes. For example on Thursday, June 2, 2016, a woman in Kano was killed for allegedly abusing the prophet. Similarly in Niger State, in May another woman was killed for blasphemy.

Religious leaders now fully understand the use of media in the propagation of their religion. They have fully embraced it. As a consequence, a number of religious preachers openly use the media to propagate not only divisive messages but also hate speech that could incite their followers against others.

It is therefore important that efforts to address and curb hate speech in the country must need to find effective ways of addressing the incidence of this major segment of hate speech.

NATURE OF RELIGIOUS SPEECH

From our observation, hate speech in the religious sphere is of two types: inter and intra religious types. The first fits the adherents of the two major faiths in the country that is Christians and Muslims which sometimes include the followers of traditional religions who can be at the receiving end of hate speech by the two major religions or themselves be purveyors of hate speech against adherents of these two other religions.

Intra-religious hate speech on the other hand, creates cleavages within the same religions. Most notable in this context are most older Christian denominations such as Catholics and Anglicans versus Pentecostalism and in Islam between tariqqa sects versus Izala or between Izala versus Shiites and so forth.

While inter-religious hate speech often tends to be a proxy for political competition and disagreement, intra-religious hate speech tends to be doctrinal, over contesting interpretations of religion and religious practices. From our observatory, some non religious issues such as the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen as well as the Biafran succession agitation have tended to deploy explicitly religious-based hate speech. It is this deployment of various identities to invoke religion that makes this to be explosive.

The army attack in December 2016 on members of Islamic Movement of Nigeria has provided the context for a conversation of hate speech between members of the movement and other sects of Islam, with other sects seeking to legitimize the killings of the members of the movement by the army.

From our observation such terms are used in hate speech to demonize and dehumanize the other: Phedophido, Infedils, Zindiq (atheist), Bokoharamist, Arna, Hausa Fulani blood suckers, Almajirist, Pigs, Hausa goats, Expired arabs, etc.

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS RELIGIOUS DISHARMONY

Over the years, there have been various efforts aimed at promoting religious harmony so as to enhance peaceful co-existence. These include the setting up of the inter-religious council, the effort driven by the Sultan and Cardinal Onaiyekan and the various inter-faith efforts. All these are commendable; however, they do not address the issue of hate speech which clearly undermines any move towards unity and harmony among people of different faith.

Recently both Plateau and Kaduna States have set up State Peace Commissions charged with the responsibility to promote dialogue and peace building in their respective states. They are good initiatives, although it is too early to assess their impact.

Kaduna State has also tried to pass a legislation to control the language of preaching in the state. This has at its heart an effort to deal with hate speech in religious places and in preaching. This bill was however roundly opposed by both Muslims and Christians.

The Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna has also produced a draft bill on religious tolerance which has as one of its aims to curb hate speech. They have been in consultations with the Inter religious Council as well as the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs which is working to have the bill to be presented to the National Assembly by the President as an executive bill. Through the legislative dialogues on hate speech that CITAD organized with members of the House Committee on National Security and Intelligence, this bill was taken by the Committee to be worked upon and be the basis for a private members bill by the Committee to the House of Representatives on the need to address hate speech. For so far, not much has happened in that direction.

The efforts by Savannah Centre has focused on the channel of hate speech, rather than the nature of hate speech, working to get media owners and media workers to address the prevalence of hate speech in their medium.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) initiative on the other hand has focused on investigating the use of hate speech by politicians during the 2015 general elections. So far a couple of public hearings have been held and the intention is to make a firm documentation with which the NHRC could prosecute those found to have used hate speech during the 2015 electioneering campaign.

Recently also, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) has started a nationwide campaign for peace building through public sensitization on hate speech which CITAD offered it support in Kano, Jigawa, Taraba and Bauchi states. This is another welcome development.

All those efforts are useful. They however do not directly address religious-based hate speech in the country. There is need to work directly with religious communities and religious leadership to get them to be more accountable with what they say and what they do. It is in this context that we offer this policy brief.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS THE RELIGION-BASED HATE SPEECH

The peace architecture in Nigeria is driven by adhoc responses to increasing divisive threats. The sector is characterized by a poor policy framework, a lack of proactive response to early warning information and a blind attitude to hate speech by both government and law enforcement agencies as well as a laiz fair response to religious conversations and religious preaching, including the teaching of religious studies in our schools. There is no agency or authority charged with the responsibility of promoting peace in the country. The National Orientation Agency could claim this mandate but it has its fingers on so many things that in spite of its huge structure and reach, it cannot effectively perform the task of promoting peace as it is now.

Anyone can decide on his or her own to be a preacher and preach freely without any reference as to whether he or she is knowledgeable or not. Teachers are made to teach religious knowledge on the basis of the 'sound' of their names rather than their knowledge: thus a 'John' is sufficient to teach Christian Religious Knowledge while a 'Murtala' is deemed fit for Islamic Religious Knowledge. There are no guidelines and no assessment, ensuring we have preachers who have no business preaching and teachers of religious knowledge who only serve as elements in the transmission of hatred and intolerance. Our various education ministries have abdicated their supervisory and monitoring role and kept their eyes closed to what takes place in the name of teaching religious studies in the schools. Instances in which teachers serve not only as purveyors of but also transmission belt of hate speech abound and are common knowledge. Yet this is done under the watch of the supervisory role of our education authorities at various levels.

As elements of a framework for inoculating citizens against hate speech, coming out from our consultations with various stakeholders, the following have been highlighted:

1. The need to ensure that only professionally trained teachers are deployed to teach religious studies in our schools
2. That preaching should be regulated with clear accountability mechanisms on the part of these licensed to preach

3. That peace education should be mainstreamed in the civic education curricula of schools and be properly taught
4. That school inspection should include continuous vetting of religious teachers to ensure that they do not teach hatred
5. That governments at all levels must strive to be impartial and respond to issues as such

Although there is call for legislation on the matter of hate speech with some sponsoring bills, we fear that legislation alone works only after the damage has been done and the feared violence had occurred. Given the disposition of our legal system, it is also feared that deciding on legal cases could hang on for years before a determination is made. Moreover, as experience has shown, in countries with hate speech laws, often it is victims of hate speech that tend to be prosecuted under the laws. For these reasons, we prefer developing a policy framework that could promote a regime of moral sanctions against hate speech as well as the inoculation of the population against engaging in hate speech and being immune to the propensity of hate speech to mobilizing individuals/groups to commit or condone violent calls to action.

This is why we should go beyond criminalizing hate speech to address the full spectrum of the peace architecture in the country. The reason why responses to threat to peace are adhoc is that there is no one single government agency with responsibility for peace building and conflict mitigation. In this sense therefore, it makes for a wise response to have a national peace commission or agency that will be charged with the responsibility of promoting peace building, conflict apprehension and mitigation as well as promoting communal dialogues. Getting such a commission or agency will require a review of existing relevant policies and laws to harmonize them, streamline responsibilities and create a clear and an unambiguous mandate for the agency which will act proactively to promote peace.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Government
 - a. Review the national peace architecture with a view to establishing a national peace commission charged with responsibility for promoting peace
 - b. Enact a religious tolerance law that will among other things, make explicit provisions against hate speech and provide for processes, procedures and guidelines for preaching in the country
 - c. Mainstream peace education in the civic education curricula of secondary schools to socialize youth minds into the imperatives of peace building
 - d. Ensure that religious studies curricula in the country are sensitive to our national aspiration for peaceful co-existence and that teachers of religious knowledge must be regularly supervised to ensure that they do not teach hatred to students
 - e. Government law enforcement agencies and security authorities should be made to become proactive in the use of early warning information to preempt threat to peace which is easily detectible by analyses of the flow and nature of hate speech in the society
 - f. Empower the National Orientation Agency to engage in continuous public education against hate speech in the communities

2. Religious Leaders

- a. Should enlighten their followers against hate and dangerous speech.
- b. Should refrain from using inciting language and caution their followers from using hate speech to voice their grievances.
- c. Must always condemn hate speech wherever it is made and by whoever.
- d. Should at all times promote dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts and support the promotion of inclusivity in all governance programmes and activities at all levels.
- e. Should support the call that only properly trained in religious studies should be made teachers of religious studies in our schools.
- f. Should engage in more interfaith activities to deepen interfaith understanding and solidarity.

3. Media

- a. Should desist from providing space for preachers and religious leaders using inflammatory language.
- b. Should support religious leaders in their efforts to sensitize their followers against hate speech by providing space for such efforts.
- c. Should avoid using terms that conjure negative images of others that are often used by hate speech makers.
- d. Should support strategies and efforts aimed at deploying moral sanctions against religious leaders and preachers who engage in hate speech such as by ensuring that they are not reported or featured in the media.

4. Civil society

- a. Should engage in activities that will promote understanding among different religions and sects in the country.
- b. Intensify advocacy to religious leaders in order to sensitize them on the dangers of hate speech, religious conflict as well as solicit their support in the campaign against hate speech and other issues that have the potential to cause violence.
- c. Develop preemptive mechanisms of addressing hate speech and hate speakers.
- d. Support the advocacy for government to develop and implement appropriate national frameworks that could serve to curb hate speech in the religious arena in particular, and more generally in the media space in the country.
- e. Create more interfaith forums for promoting religious understanding and solidarity.

ABOUT CITAD

Centre for Information Technology and Development (www.citad.org) is a capacity building civil society organization whose activities covers research, advocacy, training and publicity in all areas of ICTs. Its vision is: a knowledge-based democratic society free of hunger while its mission is: using ICTs to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable development

MAIN OFFICE

3rd Floor, NSITF Building, No 1A, Social Insurance road, behind Trade Fair Complex, Zaria road, Kano.

P.O. Box 10210, Kano, Nigeria.

Tel. +2348068078282, +2348065429784.

Email: info@citad.org

website: www.citad.org, www.citad4peace.org.ng

Facebook: Centre for Information Technology and Development

Twitter: @ICTAdvocates

ABUJA OFFICE

No. 8, Accra Street, Wuse Zone 5, FCT, Abuja

JIGAWA OFFICE

Flat B, Aduwa House, behind old market, Dutse, Jigawa state

BAUCHI OFFICE

NUJ Complex, Ahmadu Bello Way, Bauchi, Bauchi state

AZARE OFFICE

Central Office Building, Emir's Drive, opposite Emir's palace, Azare, Bauchi state

JAMA'ARE OFFICE

Harafai Road, Jama'are LGA Secretariat, Jama'are, Bauchi state



Centre for Information Technology
and Development

MacArthur
Foundation