

Research Paper on: Strategies to Counter Hate Speech

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Introduction

Hate speech is one of the mechanisms used to propagate a culture of discrimination and hostility among communities. In some cases, it escalates to incitement to violence. When hate evolves into incitement or the targeting of a specific social group based on religious, sectarian, racial, or ethnic identity, it poses a grave threat to democratic values, social stability, and peace.

Addressing hate speech does not imply restricting or prohibiting freedom of expression. Rather, it involves taking appropriate measures to prevent its exacerbation. A clear distinction must be maintained between the right to **freedom of opinion and expression**—as enshrined in national legislation and international human rights instruments—and **hate speech**. In a dynamic and interactive digital environment, diverse patterns of media exposure emerge, along with varied methods of utilizing digital platforms to disseminate ideas, information, or, conversely, as vehicles for spreading intolerance and hate.

Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the constitutional and international frameworks that prohibit and criminalize hate speech. It also explores the role of the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt (NCHR) in promoting human rights, fostering a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, and addressing issues such as religious contempt and sports-related fanaticism.

The National Council for Human Rights and its Mandate

The National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) is an independent national human rights institution established to promote and protect human rights, entrench related values, and foster a culture of rights and freedoms. The Council was established by Law No. 94 of 2003, amended by Law No. 197 of 2017. It is also recognized under Article 214 of the 2014 Constitution as one of Egypt's independent national institutions.

NCHR operates in accordance with the “Paris Principles”—a set of international standards that guide the establishment and functioning of national human rights institutions (NHRIs). These principles were formulated at an international workshop in Paris in 1991 and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993.

The Paris Principles are comprehensive and universal. They apply to all NHRIs regardless of their specific structure or type. They require that an NHRI be established through constitutional or legislative means, with a clearly defined mandate and set of powers. They also call for the broadest possible human rights mandate. The principles emphasize pluralism within the institution and

cooperation with all sectors of society—including civil society organizations, judicial bodies, professional associations, and governmental entities. They underscore the need for sufficient infrastructure and funding to ensure institutional independence and operational effectiveness.

NHRIs are expected to provide recommendations and proposals to governments on various human rights issues, including existing or draft legislation, patterns of violations, and the general human rights situation in the country.

Accreditation of NHRIs is conducted by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) through its Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA), based on compliance with the Paris Principles.

Since 2006, NCHR has held “A” status—the highest level of accreditation, reflecting international recognition.

The Council’s Role in Promoting Human Rights Culture, Tolerance, and Combating Hate Speech and Extremism

Throughout history, humanity has endured the devastating consequences of intolerance and racism—conflicts and wars often fueled by fanaticism. Today’s world urgently requires proactive tolerance and positive coexistence to uproot the growing seeds of violence and hate. The relationship between human rights and tolerance has deepened with the development of pluralism in human societies.

Human rights are moral principles and social standards inherent to all individuals by virtue of their humanity. These rights are **inalienable, universal, indivisible, interdependent**, and constantly evolving, grounded in the goal of enhancing **human dignity**. They encompass values such as equality, liberty, non-discrimination, peace, tolerance, and coexistence—regardless of one’s identity, location, language, or ethnicity. This is affirmed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and enshrined in subsequent international instruments.

The third generation of human rights places a strong emphasis on solidarity, tolerance, peace, and the preservation of humanity’s cultural heritage. These rights require international cooperation and global solidarity for effective realization.

This historical convergence between human rights and tolerance underpins the modern concept of tolerance, which is anchored in the **inherent dignity** of every person and the protection of their rights without discrimination. Accordingly, international human rights treaties reaffirm this connection. The 1995 UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance—adopted by the United Nations General Assembly—explicitly links human rights, tolerance, democracy, and peace, emphasizing the UN’s commitment to promoting tolerance by encouraging intercultural and interfaith understanding.

Tolerance is thus a cornerstone of human rights and democracy, forming the social fabric through which democracy is practiced. It is a foundational principle for building inclusive societies.

Tolerance entails a commitment to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. It rejects authoritarianism and is firmly embedded in the principles articulated in international human rights conventions. It also affirms the right of every individual to believe freely and to respect others' right to do the same—meaning that no person has the right to impose their views on others. Certain conditions, however, are necessary to cultivate a climate of tolerance, such as mutual intellectual tolerance, political democracy, and the rule of law.

In international law, the concept of a “culture of tolerance” is relatively modern but fundamental for achieving democratic governance. It requires accepting others and coexisting peacefully. It also frames an individual's relationship with their own beliefs, discouraging dogmatism and the misuse of values to justify violence or destruction. Today, tolerance is a social, political, cultural, and moral necessity.

Tolerance represents one of the noblest human values; it is the ethical opposite of fanaticism. It represents a religious value, linked to brotherhood and love, a political value that accepts difference, a human rights value advocating non-discrimination and equality, and a social value that facilitates peaceful coexistence and the acceptance of diverse opinions, beliefs, and practices.

The Concept of Tolerance

Tolerance encompasses a set of values, ideas, and principles that guide individuals to forgive others, respect pluralism of opinion, acknowledge differing beliefs, and accept diversity—even amidst disagreement. It includes interfaith coexistence, freedom of expression, rejection of racism and hate, and upholding the right to difference, as well as dialogue ethics.

Coexistence

Coexistence is grounded in the acceptance of ideological diversity and the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding among all people. It is based on principles such as justice, compassion, mercy, cooperation, and acceptance of others.

Acceptance of Others

Acceptance of others requires respecting different viewpoints and offering constructive feedback. It involves honoring fellow citizens of diverse faiths who share a common homeland and defend it. Acceptance is fostered through compassion, collaboration, constructive criticism, and the avoidance of destructive criticism, bullying, or derogatory behavior.

Culture of Tolerance and Coexistence in the 2014 Egyptian Constitution

The 2014 Constitution enshrines citizenship as a foundational principle of the Republic of Egypt.

The preamble affirms this commitment. Article (1) establishes Egypt as a republic founded on citizenship and the rule of law. Article (9) affirms equality of opportunity and prohibits discrimination. Article (53) guarantees equality among citizens, providing a robust constitutional basis for promoting tolerance, coexistence, and acceptance of others. Article (47) underscores the protection of Egypt's cultural identity, while Article 50 emphasizes the preservation of cultural diversity and pluralism.

UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance

Adopted on 16 November 1995, this declaration defines tolerance as respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of world cultures, forms of expression, and human attributes. Tolerance is strengthened through knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. It is harmony in difference—as stated in Article (1) of the declaration.

NCHR’s Role in Promoting Tolerance and Combating Hate Speech and Extremism

Promoting a culture of human rights and raising awareness is a core mandate of NCHR.

The Council has pursued several strategic areas, including:

1. Reforming Educational Curricula to Align with Human Rights:

Over several years, the Council conducted research to assess how educational content shapes societal values. It analyzed the curricula of primary and secondary education (both general and technical), producing detailed content analyses to evaluate how human rights principles are integrated.

2. National Project for Disseminating a Human Rights Culture:

Launched officially in April 2007, this comprehensive initiative targeted seven groups: media professionals from national broadcasting services, journalists, lawyers, school activity coordinators, social workers, youth center administrators, local council members, and university students (especially those studying law, education, arts, mass communication, and political science). The project implemented tailored training programs and workshops addressing each group’s needs.

3. Integrating Human Rights into the National Plan:

Egypt’s National Plan identifies dissemination of a culture of human rights as one of four strategic goals, second only to improving the overall human rights situation. The National Plan includes a dedicated section for this objective, grounded in the Paris Principles and relevant UN documentation.

Since its establishment, NCHR has consistently prioritized the promotion of tolerance, coexistence, and acceptance.

In 2017, NCHR hosted a workshop to develop an international Charter of Honor on tolerance and acceptance of others. Titled “The Role of Educational, Media, Cultural, and Religious Institutions in Promoting Human Rights Culture, Citizenship, and Rule of Law,” the workshop built on earlier activities, including one focused on strengthening citizenship and the rule of law. In May 2022, the Council reviewed a draft law to combat hate speech, prepared by the Coptic Evangelical Organization and drafted by NCHR member Mr. Essam Shiha, as part of national efforts to address hate speech.

The Concept of Hate Speech

Hate speech lacks a universally agreed-upon definition or designation at both the international and national levels. Its conceptualization varies across time and space and is influenced by diverse socio-political, cultural, and legal foundations. As such, multiple definitions have emerged to describe hate speech.

Definitions and Forms of Hate Speech

The United Nations, in its Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019), 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 based on who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”

Other definitions emphasize similar dimensions. Hate speech has also been described as:

- Any expression that incites prejudice and hostility, targeting individuals or groups based on inherent characteristics such as religion, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, or other identity attributes. Such speech may aim to harm, marginalize, intimidate, dehumanize, or incite violence or exclusion.
- Any rhetoric that spreads aversion or hatred toward one or more components of society and implicitly advocates for their exclusion, whether through expulsion, extermination, or the denial of fundamental rights and personhood.
- UNESCO defines hate speech as “any form of expression that advocates incitement to harm, particularly through discriminatory, hostile or violent means, based on the target’s identity.”

Typologies of Hate Speech

1. Hate Speech Prohibited under International Law

International law strictly prohibits direct and public incitement to genocide. This includes calls to commit, in whole or in part, acts such as the killing of a person or group, infliction of serious bodily or mental harm, or deliberate destruction of property targeting the identity group in question.

2. Hate Speech Subject to Legal Restrictions

While not all hate speech constitutes a criminal offense, international human rights law permits the restriction of expression under specific conditions, particularly where it is necessary to protect the rights of others, preserve national security or public order, or safeguard public health or morals. In such cases, civil or administrative remedies (e.g., compensation claims) may apply without necessarily involving criminal liability.

Legal Framework for Combatting Hate Speech in Egypt and International Law

The Egyptian Constitution

- Article (1) affirms Egypt as a sovereign, indivisible democratic republic based on citizenship and the rule of law.
- Article (9) obligates the State to ensure equal opportunity without discrimination.
- Article (11) guarantees gender equality in all rights and mandates protection from all forms of violence and discrimination against women, including enabling their access to public functions and leadership.
- Article (19) emphasizes education as a right, fostering identity, scientific thinking, innovation, and the values of citizenship, tolerance, and non-discrimination.
- Article (53) explicitly criminalizes discrimination and incitement to hatred, affirming equal rights and freedoms regardless of religion, belief, gender, origin, ethnicity, disability, social status, or political/geographical affiliation. It calls for the establishment of an independent anti-discrimination commission.

The Egyptian Penal Code

- Article (161) criminalizes all forms of discrimination.
- Article (176) criminalizes incitement to discrimination and hatred.

International Legal Instruments

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)

- Article (7) guarantees equality before the law and protection from discrimination and incitement to discrimination.
- Article 29(2) permits lawful limitations on rights where necessary to respect the rights of others and uphold public order and morality in a democratic society.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)

- Article (19) affirms the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information. However, this right carries duties and responsibilities, and may be subject to restrictions that are provided by law, necessary, and proportionate for:

- Respecting the rights or reputations of others,
- Protecting national security, public order, health, or morals. The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 34 emphasizes that any such restrictions must be lawful, necessary, and the least intrusive means to achieve the protective function.

- Article 20(2) mandates: "Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law."

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965)

Article (4) obliges State Parties to:

- Condemn all propaganda and organizations based on ideas of racial superiority or hatred,
- Criminalize incitement to racial discrimination,
- Prohibit organizations that promote racial hatred,
- Take positive measures to eliminate incitement and acts of racial discrimination.

UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019)

This strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

1. Upholding freedom of opinion and expression, with an emphasis on promoting dialogue rather than suppressing communication.
2. Assigning collective responsibility for countering hate speech across governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals.
3. Empowering a new generation of digital citizens capable of identifying and countering hate speech.

Key commitments include:

- Monitoring and analyzing hate speech.
- Addressing root causes and driving factors.
- Supporting victims.
- Convening relevant stakeholders.
- Engaging with traditional and digital media.
- Harnessing technology.
- Promoting education as a tool for combating hate speech.
- Encouraging inclusive, peaceful, and just societies.

ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15

Issued by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, this policy highlights the threat hate speech poses to democratic cohesion, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.

Key principles include:

- The objective of combatting hate speech must focus on protecting individuals and groups, not shielding ideas, ideologies, or religions from criticism.
- Restrictions should not be misused to suppress dissent, political opposition, or minority voices.

ECRI Recommendations include:

1. Raising public awareness about the harms of hate speech through:

- Countering misinformation and harmful stereotypes.
- Implementing educational programs targeting children, youth, public officials, and the general population.
- Supporting civil society organizations.

2. Providing support to victims by:

- Offering guidance on available remedies.
- Facilitating reporting mechanisms.

3. Promoting self-regulation among institutions, including political parties, educational institutions, and sports and cultural bodies.

4. Clarifying civil and administrative liability for hate speech while protecting free expression by:

- Holding perpetrators and internet service providers accountable,
- Granting judicial authorities power to remove hate content online under due process,
- Ensuring standing for equality bodies, national human rights institutions, and NGOs to litigate against hate speech.

Causes of Hate Speech and Strategies for Its Prevention and Mitigation

Hate speech is driven by a combination of structural, social, and institutional factors, beginning with familial upbringing, followed by the influence of educational institutions. Other contributing factors include the proliferation of extremist religious discourse, as well as the pivotal role of traditional and digital media platforms, particularly social media, which today serve as primary, unregulated spaces for the dissemination of hate speech. These dynamics are further compounded by the absence or weak enforcement of legislative and policy frameworks that criminalize or regulate hate speech in many contexts.

In truth, these same factors—though they contribute to the production and normalization of hate speech—can also serve as strategic entry points for intervention, prevention, and transformation, provided that they are reoriented and used to promote values of human dignity, non-discrimination, pluralism, and peaceful coexistence.

The following outlines key domains for intervention:

1. Upbringing and Education

The family constitutes the foundational environment where the individual's values and worldview are first shaped. Parents and guardians bear a critical responsibility not only for the physical and material welfare of children but also for nurturing ethical values such as mutual respect, tolerance, and the acceptance of diversity. Within this context, early childhood experiences can either cultivate a disposition of empathy and human solidarity or instill bias, hatred, and discriminatory attitudes, which are then internalized and projected in later interpersonal and social interactions.

The second formative environment is the education system. Schools and other educational institutions play a central role in shaping cognitive and behavioral development, social attitudes, and ethical awareness. In many Arab countries, curricula have been found to contain biased narratives and discriminatory content that reinforce sectarian, ethnic, gender-based, or religious divisions. This form of institutionalized discrimination contributes to the normalization of hate speech and the marginalization of particular groups.

Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive review and reform of national curricula to eliminate discriminatory or hate-inducing content, while integrating modules that promote human rights education, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and respect for difference. Curricula must be grounded in international human rights principles—including equality, non-discrimination, and the right to education—as articulated in instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). In addition, teacher training programs should incorporate HRE approaches that equip educators with tools to counter hate speech and foster inclusive learning environments.

2. Religious Discourse

Religious-based hate speech represents one of the most dangerous forms of incitement, particularly when it falsely invokes divine justification for exclusion, hostility, or even violence against individuals or groups on the basis of belief or religious identity. Such discourse, when left unchecked, contributes to radicalization and, in extreme cases, fuels acts of religiously motivated violence and hate crimes—amounting to forms of incitement prohibited under Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which obliges States to prohibit “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.”

Correcting and reforming religious discourse is, therefore, a matter of both legal obligation and social necessity. It requires sustained efforts to engage religious leaders, scholars, and institutions in promoting inclusive, pluralistic interpretations of religious teachings that emphasize human dignity and peaceful coexistence. Individuals who hold religious authority must be held accountable to standards of non-discrimination and must be capacitated to use their platforms to counteract divisive narratives.

Furthermore, interfaith collaboration and joint religious initiatives can play a powerful role in modeling the values of tolerance and shared humanity, reinforcing the idea that all faiths call for respect, compassion, and peaceful relations among peoples. Religious leaders from diverse backgrounds should be encouraged to undertake joint actions and public statements that denounce sectarianism, extremism, and hate speech in all its forms.

3. Media and Social Media Platforms

The unprecedented expansion of access to both traditional media (television, radio, print) and digital platforms (particularly social media) has made these channels primary arenas for public discourse. In the absence of adequate regulation and oversight, these spaces often serve as fertile ground for the spread of hate speech and misinformation. This phenomenon has been particularly

visible in the post-Arab Spring period, where media platforms have been used to propagate polarizing narratives and incite discrimination on religious, political, ethnic, or social grounds.

Alarmingly, hate speech via digital platforms is increasingly generated and amplified by youth populations—who also represent future leaders and policymakers. According to official data from Facebook, the company removed over 7 million posts containing hate speech between October 2018 and March 2019 alone, underscoring the scale of the challenge.

Confronting hate speech in media requires a multi-pronged strategy:

- Capacity-building for media professionals, including journalists, editors, and content creators, on ethical journalism, responsible reporting, and international human rights standards related to freedom of expression and non-discrimination.
- Enforcement of professional codes of ethics and conduct that prohibit incitement to hatred and require balanced and inclusive coverage of marginalized groups.
- Legislative and regulatory frameworks that hold media institutions accountable for disseminating hate speech, in line with international standards—particularly the Rabat Plan of Action, which provides guidelines for assessing the threshold of incitement under international law.

Social media platforms, while offering spaces for engagement and expression, must be subject to regulatory frameworks that require transparency, content moderation, and algorithmic accountability. There is also an urgent need to train civil society actors, human rights defenders, and dialogue facilitators to use social media to counter hate speech, amplify voices of tolerance, and build online communities grounded in mutual respect and shared values.

A field study conducted by Dr. Heba Mohamed Shafik Abdelrazek, titled “**Determinants of Egyptian Youth’s Awareness of the Concept of Hate Speech and Its Strategies in Digital Media,**” offers an important empirical contribution to this field. The study addressed a critical gap in academic research on hate speech in the Arab region and aimed to assess the level of awareness among Egyptian youth regarding the concept of hate speech, as well as their familiarity with digital tools and strategies used to counter it.

Below are the results of the field study:

Table 1 below shows youth attitudes towards the most common forms of hate speech on social media.

Forms of Hate Speech	N	%
Verbal violence such as insults and curses	312	23.6
Racist speech	128	9.6
Threats and intimidation	71	5.3
Incitement to violence	125	9.4

Posts, images, or drawings that deviate from social values and customs	205	15.5
Extremist ideas and concepts	131	10
Speech containing a tone of superiority over others	95	7.1
Posts expressing intolerance	126	9.5
Positions against the state, its policies, and its achievements	72	5.4
Feelings and emotions characterized by exclusion and unilateralism	57	4.6

Table 2 below shows the reasons for the spread of hate speech.

Reasons for the spread of hate speech	Probable	Mean	Percentile
Disparity in opinions and attitudes	2476	6.167	68.52
Different beliefs	2710	6.775	75.27
Different social values	2709	6.772	75.25
Social and economic disparities	2468	6.170	68.55
Psychological motives, including isolation, jealousy, venting, revenge, and depression	1785	4.462	49.58
Weak deterrent laws and legislation	1556	3.890	43.22
Imbalance in social structure	1870	4.675	51.93
An indicator of reaction to violence practiced in the social context	1150	2.875	31.94
Affiliation with extremist groups, whether intellectually, religiously, or politically	1388	3.470	38.55

Table 3 below shows the effects of the spread of hate speech on social media.

The effects of the spread of hate speech on social media platforms	Probable	Mean	Percentile
Inciting strife among societal components	2090	5.225	65.31
Threatening the unity of the social fabric	1687	4.217	52.71

Fostering the spread of extremism among youth	2050	5.125	64.06
Alienating local and foreign investors	1078	2.695	33.68
Contributing to the dissemination of misleading information	1777	4.442	55.53
Fostering the spread of verbal and behavioral societal violence	2044	5.110	63.03
Increasing crimes and immoral acts	1921	4.802	60.03
Declining commitment to religion and its lofty values	1729	4.322	54.03

4. Legal Criminalization

Legal criminalization of hate speech may not be the ultimate solution, but it acts as a deterrent and a complementary element to the broader system of prevention. This concept is not new; it began with the emergence of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the 1960s, which was the first international treaty to explicitly criminalize hate speech.

Some Arab countries have begun enacting laws that criminalize hate speech—for example, the UAE’s Anti-Discrimination and Hatred Law, along with similar efforts in Bahrain, Jordan, and others. Such legislation is urgently needed across all Arab nations to confront the dangers of hate speech in the media, social media platforms, and other communication channels.

Currently, there is no specific legal provision that addresses hate speech across various media platforms or social networks. Instead, certain offenses committed in cyberspace are penalized under other existing laws such as Egypt’s Anti-Cybercrime Law No. 175 of 2018 and the Penal Code. In June 2017, Egypt’s Al-Azhar Institution proposed a draft law to combat hate speech and violence. Article (8) of this draft stated: “It is prohibited to publish or disseminate any news, images, interviews, or media content—whether visual, written, or audio—if its publication incites hatred.”

Additionally, a proposed law against hate speech was submitted by the Coptic Evangelical Organization and was discussed during a workshop held by NCHR on May 16, 2022. However, the draft still requires the inclusion of a precise definition of hate speech, in addition to harsher penalties for incitement to hate.

Sports Fanaticism as a Model of Hate Speech

Definition of Sports Fanaticism

Sports fanaticism can be defined as an intense, emotionally charged bias that prevents individuals from accepting evidence contradicting their opinion or judgment about a particular idea, subject, team, player, coach, referee, or official. It leads to an overwhelming emotional response that overrides rational thinking.

Consequences of Sports Fanaticism

If left unaddressed and unregulated, sports fanaticism can escalate into violence and rioting, resulting in severe consequences. It transforms sports from a source of recreation and entertainment into a dangerous phenomenon that threatens lives.

The most notable manifestations of this fanaticism include:

- 1. Offensive language, writings, and gestures**
- 2. Destruction of sports facilities and public/private property**
- 3. Physical assaults**
- 4. Looting and theft**
- 5. Attacks on transportation systems**

Notable Incidents of Sports Fanaticism:

- **Port Said Stadium (Egypt, February 1, 2012):** Following a match between Al-Ahly and Al-Masry football clubs, 74 people were killed and hundreds injured. This was the deadliest sports-related tragedy in Egypt.
- **Turkey (1964):** Riots following a football match between two local clubs resulted in 44 deaths and 600 injuries.
- **Soviet Union (1982):** Violence after a match between Moscow's Spartak and Haarlem led to 69 deaths and over 100 injuries.

There is no doubt that sports fanaticism has far-reaching negative consequences—not only for individuals but for society as a whole. It can undermine the social fabric and lead to societal conflicts that threaten national security and stability. The solution lies in minimizing violent content in media, promoting positive sportsmanship, and enhancing the supervisory role of legal institutions.

Blasphemy: Between Freedom of Expression and Hate Speech

Hate speech that results in blasphemy has become increasingly common in recent times, taking various forms such as drawings, films, novels, media statements, and other expressions—particularly targeting Islam. This has ignited debates about the relationship between freedom of expression and religious insult.

1. The View Supporting Blasphemy as Freedom of Expression

Proponents of this view argue that freedom of expression—including religious opinions—cannot be restricted unless it explicitly calls for racially discriminatory violence. This is consistent with General Comment No. 34 of the UN Human Rights Committee on Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

They argue that criminalizing blasphemy limits freedom of expression, which they see as an inherent human right. Article 19(1) of the ICCPR states:

“Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of their choice.”

2. The View Opposing Blasphemy as Freedom of Expression

Opponents argue that showing disrespect for religions fosters hatred and hostility based on faith. Mocking and denigrating religious beliefs should not be protected, as such acts can cause material or emotional harm to others. Therefore, freedom of expression must be regulated to respect others' rights and maintain public order.

Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of their personality is possible.
2. In exercising his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others, and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic society.

Freedom of expression is also limited by Article 19(3) of the ICCPR:

“The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
- b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.”

These provisions make it clear that freedom of expression is not absolute. It is limited by considerations of others' rights, public order, national security, and the prohibition of incitement to violence or religious hatred.

Legal Penalties for Blasphemy in Egyptian Criminal Law

Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code stipulates:

“Anyone who exploits religion to promote or advocate, verbally, in writing, or by any other means, extremist ideologies intended to incite strife, disparage or show contempt for one of the divine religions or its sects, or to harm national unity or social peace shall be punished with imprisonment for not less than six months and not more than five years, or with a fine not less than 500 EGP and not more than 1,000 EGP.”

While international human rights law guarantees the right to religious belief, it does not permit the defamation of religions. This is affirmed in Egypt's Constitution, which guarantees freedom of belief while prohibiting religious insult. A clear distinction exists between the right to criticize ideas and the illegal act of blaspheming religious beliefs, which is criminalized under both Egyptian and international law, as well as all major human rights instruments.

Efforts of the Egyptian State to Combat Violence and Hate Speech

The Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights (SSCHR) issued a report titled '**National Efforts to Promote Religious Freedoms in Egypt**' (2022), affirming the country's commitment to promoting values of coexistence, citizenship, and rejecting all forms of violence, hate, and extremism.

The President of Egypt has also emphasized the role of citizenship in strengthening a sense of belonging—not only nationally but also regionally and globally within a humanitarian framework. Under his directives, various government ministries and civil society organizations have cooperated to spread and reinforce this culture.

The report was organized into five main axes, outlining achievements in:

- Legislative frameworks
- Promotion of freedom of religion and belief within Egypt's National Human Rights Strategy (NHRS)
- Reconstruction and revival of religious heritage
- Regulation of religious discourse and counter-extremism efforts
- International outreach to promote peace, religious freedom, and connections with Egyptians abroad

Full details can be accessed on the official website of the Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights (SSCHR).

Recommendations

1. Enact a comprehensive law to combat hate speech.
2. Expedite the establishment of an independent Anti-Discrimination Commission, as per Article (53) of the 2014 Constitution and relevant international treaties ratified by Egypt.
3. Increase the penalties for hate speech under the Penal Code.
4. The National Council for Human Rights to organize awareness campaigns throughout Egypt's governorates, in cooperation with the Ministries of Youth and Sports, Education, and Endowments, to promote a culture of human rights, tolerance, and acceptance.
5. Conduct workshops with stakeholders, as outlined in the action plans developed by the NCHR Legislative Research and Development Unit and the Anti-Discrimination Unit.

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