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## Causes, drivers and impact of hate speech targeting minorities in social media

Respected Chair, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity to speak on a very important theme of Hate speech targeting minorities and the marginalised on social media. I represent one of the most marginalised communities in the South Asian region called Dalits who have been oppressed & excluded due to caste based discrimination or as the UN has termed it Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD). This kind of discrimination denies human dignity to over 260 Million Dalits and DWD communities, living mainly in India and South Asian countries and dispersed largely across the world. Most of the times the impact of Caste and analogous systems of hierarchy lead to exclusion, discrimination, leading to acts of cruelty and violence including major atrocities and massacres against Dalit women, children, men and other sexual minorities.

Traditional mainstream media resists to cover issues of Dalits and other marginalised communities as there is a lack of perspective and also due to the fact that there is scarce representation of Dalits and other marginalised in the main stream media and therefore many of the issues of the Dalits have been invisibilised. However this is the age of digital media, where ideas and thoughts can be shared through Facebook, twitter, tik tok, and Instagram without really considering the consequences of the actions. About 3.82 billion people globally use social media and have access to smart phones or laptops to be active users; among this several are from India and the region. According to statistics India has one of the fastest growing social media users; in 2019-20 alone about 130 million users joined the platform. On an average the Indian social media users are on the medium for about 2.30 hrs.

While social media has provided an opportunity, it is not a level playing field for the marginalised communities to access. Conversely it has created an atmosphere of fear and intolerance, as there is more often than not outburst of obnoxious hate speech. Perpetrators get away with impunity. There are seldom any mechanisms of accountability to address hate speech and other hostilities from DWD or Dalit perspective. Social media and the online world is mirroring the offline world, where prejudice and hatred towards marginalised communities continue to exist. When opinions are voiced against these perpetrators of in the real world, it can lead to violence and death. More so women from the marginalised communities face rape threats and murder threats for voicing their opinion on the injustices of caste based discrimination and violence.

In this context it is indeed encouraging to notice that certain social media platforms have begun to tackle this lacunae and have built in layers of filtering hatred. Community standards & rules of several platforms also have begun to employ such mechanisms and the respective implementing teams have to be sensitised on the issues of Dalits and other marginalised groups or communities. However the worrying trends of increasing trolling and targeting voices that raise this issue and ensured that their mere presence on the social media is a bane to society.

Another area of concern is in the geographical areas wherein diverse communities live, there tend to be raising tempers based on past or existing conflicts which always are simmering. In this context misinformation and rumours tend to create unrest leading to unravelling of the

deep rooted casteism, patriarchy and religious intolerance. These fuel hate speech against minorities and the marginalised communities.

As noted by the Secretary-General at the launch of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate speech – "*Hate speech is in itself an attack on tolerance, inclusion, diversity and the very essence of our human rights norms and principles. More broadly, it undermines social cohesion, erodes shared values, and can lay the foundation for violence, setting back the cause of peace, stability, sustainable development and the fulfillment of human rights for all*".

Echoing the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate speech – I strongly recommend -

Recommendations:

1. Respective governments, societies and the private sector should resolve to have a Zero tolerance for hate speech and essential steps be taken to identify the causes, drivers and conditions conducive to hate speech and make systems of accountability with swift action.
2. The United Nations should support a new generation of digital citizens, empowered to recognize, reject and stand up to hate speech;
3. Include digital accountability clauses in the existing effective laws that are already in place. For example India has a special law to address violence and discrimination based on caste and ethnicity. Additional clauses are needed to curb hate speech.
4. The community standards must be strengthened within the social media platforms to understand and recognise caste based abuse.
5. Artificial intelligence has been used to curb and filter out caste based online abuse. This has been tried before and should become the norm to be able to curb such online violence
6. Members of the marginalised communities like the Dalits, Tran's folks and minorities need to be part of the policy teams within these platforms so that they can help and support designing far inclusive policies

I wish to conclude by saying that online social media platforms are going to continue to be the bedrock of social activism and more and more young people will continue to use these platforms to engage, to voice out opinions and take strong positions. Stringent measures must be adopted and online spaces must be inclusive and equitable and safe so people from all castes, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and colour can use these spaces to further amplify voices and opinions! Thank you and Jai Bhim!