



**46th Human Rights Council Session  
18 March 2021**

**General Debate, Item 5**

**Statement by the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans  
and Intersex Association**

**Joined by: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association**

*Delivered by Daniele Paletta*

Madam President,

we welcome the recommendations made by the Forum on Minority Issues<sup>1</sup> and specifically the recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people as one of the populations who are particularly vulnerable to hate speech on social media platforms.

Like for other groups who are confronted with marginalisation in everyday life, the online space has been revolutionary for LGBTI people: it has helped creating communities.

But with more visibility, also came backlash: 84% of respondents to a survey conducted by ILGA World in 2020 said that online spaces have exposed them to hate speech and threats.

In many states, such hate speech is indirectly legitimised by state officials who use exactly the same means to dehumanise our communities, scapegoat us for political gains, and spread misinformation about who we are. When people in power use hate speech against any community, it fosters a sense of impunity that can translate into real-world harm.

Hostile narratives are nothing new, but unprecedentedly large audiences are exposed to them through social media. The consequences have become all the more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic: as more people were forced to engage online, attacks against the LGBTI community further intensified, coupling online harassment with disruption of virtual community meetings and further digital security threats.<sup>2</sup>

The report of the Special Rapporteur rightfully mentions the need for an inclusive access to the digital world. However, the continued harassment aims at intimidating our communities back into silence and hampers access to the digital world. Trans communities are particularly

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<sup>1</sup> [A/HRC/46/58](#)

<sup>2</sup> AccessNow (2020), [Digital Security Helpline: In 2020, LGBTQ groups are facing more online harassment than ever](#)



under attack, and the discourse may become particularly harsh when legal reforms to advance their rights are being debated.<sup>3</sup>

As the UN strategy and action plan on hate speech clearly points out, addressing hate speech means keeping it "from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence - which is prohibited under international law."<sup>4</sup>

Freedom of speech is a cornerstone of the international human rights framework, but may never become a shield under which hate speech is legitimised.

States and social media companies must take action. We call on States to improve clear laws and policies against hate speech without curbing freedom of expression, and to hold social media companies to account. We also call on officials to avoid using or encouraging hate speech themselves.

We also call on social media companies to implement their zero-tolerance policies against hate speech, continue to improve their terms of service, and to open access to disaggregated data for all stakeholders to better understand the extent of this emergency.

They should also urgently improve their content moderation policies through a human-rights based approach, and act swiftly to remove hate speech from their platforms: harmful content currently takes too long to be removed access to, especially when it's published in non-Western and minority languages, further endangering people who are being targeted.

We stand ready to work together with States, social media platforms and all stakeholders to help creating a safer online environment. Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> BrandWatch, DitchTheLabel (2019) [Exposed: The Scale of Transphobia Online](#)

<sup>4</sup> [United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech](#)