

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**18<sup>th</sup> June, 2024**

### **INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR COUNTERING HATE SPEECH**

#### **Speak Human Rights, Counter Hate Speech**

As Kenya joins the rest of the world to mark the international day for countering hate speech, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2024, it is, once again, time for us as a nation to tame our tongues.

Hate speech in Kenya has been a perennial issue and it continues to be so. Hate speech usually follows the arc of national politics with political leaders raising the stakes as elections draw near reaching a climax of hate speech as the election looms. Knowing this it is strange that 2024 has become a year full of hate speech and threat to violence based on ethnicity.

In the run up to and the aftermath of the 2022 elections, cases of hate speech had reduced considerably. Kenya being the first country in the world to come up with a **'National Action Plan Against Hate Speech'** in 2022, we should endeavour to live up to the reputation.

The acts of politicians and ordinary Kenyans have shown us that the nation is in dire need of intervention to stem the rising tides of hate speech. For example, there is the case of

how a business and personal home of a resident of Meru county was burnt down because coming from the neighbouring constituency the locals felt that he was a foreigner to them. Or the very puzzling case of a preacher who uttered very hateful words while preaching in church. The NCIC summoned him to record a statement with us. These cases signify the upsurge of hate speech.

We must be honest with ourselves; there is something quite wrong with our society today. Perhaps it may be that the people are sad, angry and depressed. We must remember that the nation has gone through a lot; from the COVID 19 pandemic, to locusts, to the recent floods and the rising cost of living. The public psyche is damaged and Kenyans need to find healthy ways of coping with the present realities. At the same time we as the NCIC are committed to our mandate and will continue to strive to eliminate hate speech regardless of difficulty.

Hating another Kenyan, just because they come from a different area, will not make your own life better. You can't rise by hate. We must all realize that together we can stand but apart as we are, we will fall.

The new political dynamics have also not helped matters in Kenya. We are seeing ethnic mobilization within Mt. Kenya and in Western Kenya too. The Tawe movement in Western Kenya is political mobilization along ethnic lines. Which is why the commission summoned Governor Natambeya over his statements. At the same time the ethnic balkanization

around the one man, one vote, one shilling is not only dividing leaders but is also creating unhealthy conversations around the privilege and development of some communities vs. others.

Indeed, it is important that we talk about our economic realities but not from an ethnic perspective. Economic talk should be national, fair and balanced in view of the fact that resource based disputes have been the main cause of conflicts within Kenya.

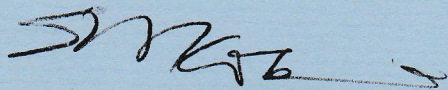
We may have survived the pandemic, floods, locusts and many other perils but if we don't tame our tongues we will for sure burn our great nation down. It is important that leaders steer clear of ethnic balkanization, vilifying other communities and thinking only of their tribe.

The use of words such as “tugeges” to describe people who support a certain political side is wrong. This word is hurtful, demeans and dehumanizes people. It is important that we stop using this and any other abusive words to describe fellow Kenyans.

Finally we must remember that social media is a powerful tool and has been used both in Kenya and other countries as flash points for ethnic violence through hate speech. This year, the commission has intervened in 95 cases of hate speech on social media. X is the platform with the most cases of hate speech standing at 72. Such misuse of social media is not only illegal but shows the inner thoughts of

some individuals who want to spread hate. They must be stopped and as a commission we are committed to this goal.

Kenya and Kenyans need time to heal and to do so without hurting each other. Kenyans need to discuss economics and the distribution of the national cake but not from a tribal perspective. We need to stand united; hand in hand; shoulder to shoulder. As a commission we continue to be committed to ending hate speech and achieving hate speech free status for our country.



**Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, CBS**  
**Commission Chairman**

**18<sup>th</sup> June, 2024**