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Resolution on Catalanophobia UNPO General Assembly 2024

Submitted by: Assemblea Nacional Catalana

Hate speech against national minority groups

Article 1 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minoritiesⁱ establishes that “States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity”.

However, this is too often not the case. Minority groups –including linguistic ones– are recurring targets of hate speech. Social media has become a propaganda vehicle for disinformation, discriminative messages, and scapegoating of minorities. Online harassment and defamation undermine freedom of expressionⁱⁱ, and can incite violence.

According to the available segregated data on hate speech in social media and on hate crimes, “approximately 70 percent or more of those targeted tend to belong to minoritiesⁱⁱⁱ”, as denounced by the former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes. Yet most international initiatives to combat hate speech “have little if any references to minorities –those most often affected by hate speech”.

The case of Catalonia

Catalanophobia is ingrained in Spanish society and manifests itself in the most unexpected ways, from the Franco dictatorship era, when Catalan culture and language were banned and persecuted, to the present day. In contemporary Spain, the authoritarian legacy of fascism is still rooted in the core of the state, which has a profound effect on Catalan society, that becomes a target of attacks. For example, last January, when Barcelona Football Club star Aitana Bonmatí won her first Ballon d’Or in Paris and gave her acceptance speech partly in Catalan –while also speaking in several languages, including Spanish and English– she faced heavy criticism in the Spanish press and on Spanish social media, simply for speaking in her mother tongue.

For decades, there has been a trend in many Spanish nationalist media and social media to spread smear campaigns, fake news and intolerant, hateful messages regarding the Catalan people. For instance, a 2020 report by Aix Global Justice Law Clinic and the UNPO^{iv} stated that in just one week, of a total of 130.000 conversations about Catalonia on Twitter, 33% had negative connotations, and seven out of the top ten Spanish influencers had published negative comments regarding Catalonia.

Hate speech against Catalans has been instrumentalised very effectively. Spanish political parties use Catalanophobia as an electoral tool, with mass media becoming an extension of their political campaigns. This fosters hate speech in realms that go beyond mere political debate.

The constant spread of negative remarks about Catalans is very dangerous as it contributes to creating negative stereotypes and leads to discrimination, Catalanophobia and violence by Spanish ultra-nationalists against Catalan citizens. In the run up to the Catalan self-determination referendum in 2017 and its aftermath, there were a total of 139 violent incidents officially reported, including 86 assaults, in just three months^v.

Catalan language is also constantly under attack and used for political purposes by Spanish nationalist parties and by the Spanish judiciary, which attacks the Catalan immersion model in the schooling system. Spanish nationalists use a discourse of false bilingualism that in fact undermines the minoritized language in the name of equality. As a consequence, the use of Catalan is decreasing with the passing of time.

The rise of hate speech, intolerance, criminalization and stigmatization of the Catalan people and its language has not been addressed by the authorities. Spanish laws to combat discrimination do not include language specifically, which is potentially inconsistent with international treaty obligations^{vi}. To make matters worse, organisations like Òmnium Cultural or the Catalan National Assembly, who are working to protect the Catalan language and culture, are attacked and repressed by Spain, even in the form of intrusive spyware.

Proposals

For all these reasons, the Catalan National Assembly

CALLS on the UNPO to put in place data collection mechanisms and to create a database where members can report and denounce cases of cultural and linguistic discrimination and hate speech.

REQUESTS the UNPO and the international community adopt a communal and internationally accepted definition of hate speech against national minority groups, and to monitor contexts susceptible to its use, such as political campaigning.

URGES the UNPO to pressure States to review their legal framework to ensure that minority languages and cultures are protected and to effectively tackle hate speech against national minorities and stateless nations.

ⁱ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Booklet_Minorities_English.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/civic-space-2023-update>

ⁱⁱⁱ A/HRC/46/57 Human Rights Council

^{iv} [https://int.assemblea.cat/wp-](https://int.assemblea.cat/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIX_GLOBAL_JUSTICE_Hate_speech_against_the_Catalan_minority-2.pdf)

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^v https://www.media.cat/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Anuari2016-2017_webok.pdf

^{vi} A/HRC/43/47/Add.1 Visit to Spain - Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues