

## Activity: Mobilising multi-stakeholders around a common approach against hate speech in mainstream and on social media in Cameroon

### CONCEPT NOTE

<b>Project</b>	<b>Workshop on setting up a multi-stakeholder observatory dedicated to countering hate speech in the media and social media in Cameroon</b>
<b>Initiator</b>	European Union Delegation to Cameroon
<b>Funding</b>	European Union Delegation to Cameroon
<b>Implementation</b>	Civic Watch
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	<b>Tuesday January 9, 2023 ; 16h – 18h30</b>
<b>Place</b>	<b>Hotel Djeuga Palace - Yaounde</b>
<b>Number participants</b>	<b>of 20</b>
<b>Target Groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media Associations</li> <li>• Civil Society, Academia</li> <li>• Public Authorities in Cameroon</li> </ul>

## I. Context & Justification

Cameroon is a multicultural and multilingual country with over 250 ethnic groups and two official languages: English and French. The country has been facing various challenges related to social cohesion, national unity and peace, especially since the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016 and the rise of violent extremism in the Far North region. The 2018 post-electoral crisis spurred by tribal undertones that fuelled tensions in the country, both online and offline with a pseudo ethnic and political divide with the emergence of *Tontinard/Sardinard* rhetoric. These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts. One of the factors that contribute to these challenges is hate speech, which is defined by the United Nations 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 on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor”*. Hate speech incites violence, discrimination and hostility against individuals or groups, undermines social harmony and threatens democratic values. In Cameroon, hate speech has been observed both online and offline, especially during electoral periods, social discourse and in relation to the Anglophone crisis. Some examples of hate speech online and offline include derogatory terms used to refer to different ethnic groups or regions (such as "Anglofou", "Francofufu", "Biafra", "Beti mafia" "Anglophone a Gauche" "Kaado", "Wari Wari", "Mouton",), insults against political opponents or public authorities (such as "dictator", "thief", "puppet" "Tontinard/Sardinard"), calls for violence (such as "kill them all"), false or misleading information that stigmatises certain communities (such as accusing them of spreading corruption or supporting terrorism).

Cameroon has witnessed a steady rise in the rate of hate speech in recent years. An armed separatist conflict that has entered its seventh year rocking the North West and South West Region has been fanned by divisive rhetoric and tribal attacks, at times leading to loss of lives. Gradually, these practices are creeping into public discourse through daily exchanges in mainstream media, social media and in the communities; with a direct ripple effect on national values like social cohesion and national integration. In this fragile context, an independent and professional media that does not exacerbate political and social tensions is essential to help bring about lasting peace and reconciliation at the national level, but even more specifically at local and community level. Knowledge on social media usage is key to achieving and promoting democratic values in an era of citizen journalism. This calls for synergy of actions between media organisations, social media platforms, regulatory agencies, the academia, national and international technical partners and civil society organisations.

## II. Our Response

Faced with these complex and constantly evolving challenges, Civic Watch through the #defyhatenow initiative is proposing a response that combines a one day multi-stakeholder workshop which aims at creating an Early Warning and Early response (EWER) structure in Cameroon that shall report on the state of hate speech in Cameroon but also map new trends and propose solutions to curbing raising hate offline and online. This response shall have as final goal to be complemented by content to raise awareness and educate people about the dangers of hate speech. This approach that shall be broad base and involve a plethora of actors from the civic space, the media, CSOs and state shall deliver a monthly EWER on hate speech. Civic Watch offers a unique portal of relevance and significance in the quest for solutions to hate speech conflict situations by promoting social cohesion and growth locally. Since 2018, this has been achieved through the implementation of a bottom up approach engaging media practitioners and community leaders through the process of Educate, Empower and Act. Beyond organising one reflection with different stakeholders from the different communities aimed at establishing a road map to track and flag hate speech both online and offline, we shall be making good use of technological advancements to operationalize this concept. Applying a bottom-up approach to problem solving, Civic Watch through this project aims to develop a multistakeholder and an inclusive strategy for peace. Earmarked activities are meant to build trust between different communities, push for an understanding between the different pejorative connotations, and develop a holistic approach against hate speech thus vying for tolerance. Discussions and reflections will also generate data to improve the knowledge of the main drivers of and community-driven responses to hate speech.

## III. Objectives

### Overall objective:

Create a platform for media professionals, peacebuilding actors and stakeholders to develop a common approach against hate speech in the media and on social media in Cameroon.

### Specific Objectives:

- Engage media professionals in an open discussion on the spread of hate speech and its dangers to the society;
- Exchange ideas and perspectives on the existing forms of hate speech, their manifestation within communities and emerging forms;
- Brainstorm on innovative strategies to curb their spread and educate the masses on the dangers they represent to the society;
- Identify Early Warning Early Response - EWER mechanisms within communities that can be leveraged to foster social cohesion and sustainable peace in Cameroon.

- Define and adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to curbing hate speech and its resultant violence in the society;
- Forster collective actions toward promoting good practices among state and private actors, international partners and lovers of peace.
- Set up a hate speech monitoring and reporting taskforce to be managed by Civic Watch and EUD in Cameroon.

#### IV. Methodology

In prelude to a national workshop on setting up a multi-stakeholder observatory dedicated to countering hate speech in the media and social media in Cameroon; Civic Watch is organising a one-day strategic focus group discussion with some relevant stakeholders. The session is scheduled for **Tuesday January 9, 2023 from 16h – 18h30** at **Hotel Djeuga Palace** in **Yaounde**. The meeting will be a facilitated discussion where participants will be expected to share insights on several topics among which:

- Hatespeech : definition and conceptual framework
- Hatespeech: Social origins, emerging forms and consequences
- Hate speech and violence in mainstream and on social media in Cameroon
- Hatespeech and elections in Cameroon
- From Hatespeech to verbal violence and social stigmatisation
- Supporting local peacebuilding initiatives for greater impact
- Adopting sustainable approach to countering hatespeech in Cameroon...

#### V. Target Beneficiary

The project targets participants from the online/offline media space, and a cross section of experts, ranging from state institutions, national and international non-governmental organisations, diplomatic missions, media associations and lovers of peace.

##### ★ Direct

- Media professionals and Associations (UPF, SNJC, CAMASSEJ, CCMN CAMP...)
- State institutions (MINCOMC, MINJEC/CNJC, NCC, NCPBM...)
- National and international non-governmental organisations
- Higher Institutes of learning and Think-tanks
- Tribal, Faith-based and sociocultural groups
- Youth and women peacebuilding organisations

##### ★ Indirect

- Media audience
- Policy and decision makers
- The general public
- The international community

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## VI. Results Awaited

- Creation of a Multi-stakeholder Joint Task Force Platform to Monitor, Report and take Action against hatespeech in Cameroon.
- Increased awareness on the importance of countering hate speech and reducing its adverse effects on individuals and the society;
- A more significant engagement/approach toward curbing hate speech;
- A greater understanding of the forces driving hate speech and the community solutions that actors and policymakers can consider;
- Media engagement in countering hate speech through relevant content on the project's themes;
- Media professionalism strengthened and citizens gain media literacy skills;
- Transformed bystanders to community peace weavers thanks to monitoring and reporting systems.

