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New initiative to enhance role of women in countering hate speech launched

(New York, 12 June 2023) – Ahead of the second International Day for Countering Hate Speech, the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) has today launched a new initiative that will serve as a blueprint for enhancing the role of women in countering hate speech and prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes*.

The Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (The Napoli Women in Communities Plan of Action) is based on a year-long consultation with women across the world working in the field of countering hate speech and preventing atrocity crimes, and its goal is to ensure that women contribute more systematically and significantly to countering hate speech and preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

In remarks read by his Chef de Cabinet, Courtenay Rattray, Secretary-General António Guterres noted that the Napoli Plan of Action was a critical initiative for two reasons:

“First, the prevention of atrocity crimes – genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity – remains an enduring challenge. It is at the heart of the mission of the United Nations,” said Guterres.

“Second, atrocity crimes have a gendered dimension, so efforts to prevent and respond to them must also take gender into account,” the Secretary-General stressed.

“This initiative sought to convene and build sustainable support systems around the work of community-level women in preventing atrocities and their incitement,” said Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, who is also the UN Focal Point on Hate Speech.

“It recognizes the crucial and central role these actors have in preventing atrocity crimes and restoring the social fabric after atrocities have been committed. It further anchors the empowerment of communities at the center of prevention of atrocity crimes, a priority for my mandate,” said Under-Secretary-General Nderitu in her remarks during the launch event.

The Napoli Women in Communities Plan of Action was drafted from a women’s perspective, which contributed to mainstreaming women’s voices and experiences in its entirety.

The plan recognizes and welcomes the several existing mechanisms to address women’s inclusion and protection, as well as their meaningful role in peace and security efforts globally. These efforts have, however, not translated into women-led initiatives aimed at countering hate speech and preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes in a mainly securitized and male-dominated field.

“We need to rethink how we approach prevention, starting by acknowledging that we have failed at including women and supporting their role in the prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes,” Special Adviser Nderitu underscored.

The Special Adviser’s view was echoed by the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, Maurizio Massari.

“Indeed, women and girls are among the most vulnerable targets of atrocity crimes. Yet, at the same time, they remain crucial actors to restore the social fabric and cohesion,” said Ambassador Massari, who is also the Vice President of the UN Economic and Social Council – ECOSOC.

“If we want to fully include a women’s perspective and promote women-led initiatives aimed at countering hate speech, we must ensure that their voices are heard, and even more so, that their voices count at the table where decisions are taken,” noted Ambassador Massari.