

Words of Violence

Freedom of expression, conflict dynamics, and the media

Saturday 26 October 2013



From violence surrounding elections to inflammatory speeches of politicians at public demonstrations, across the globe certain forms of speech have advocated, condoned and legitimized violent attacks and even killings. Often, the media – both social media and traditional mass media - are used to spread such hate speech, often targeting specific minorities. This may particularly endanger conflict-ridden societies. Effective and informed ways to deal with such speech are thus essential.

This conference will focus on this topic from a human rights vantage point, pitting the freedom of expression (including the freedom of the media) against other fundamental rights and interests, such as the right to life, non-discrimination and safety. In spite of decades of academic and political debate, the boundaries between protected and prohibited speech are not clear. International human rights law condemns speech that incites hatred and racial discrimination. On the other hand it strongly protects the freedom of expression and the media. Interpretations of norms are influenced by very diverging philosophies about the limits of the freedom of expression rather than by knowledge of the role of speech in conflict escalation in practice. It is thus essential to look for answers beyond legal thinking to tackle mediated hate speech more effectively.

The aim of the conference is to bring together insights from different fields of knowledge, ranging from law (human rights, international criminal law, media law) to conflict studies and media studies, in order to develop yardsticks to aid judges and policymakers in the interpretation and application of current international norms on free speech. In doing so, we will seek to address and debate a number of tensions, including (1) freedom of expression vs. other fundamental interests: life, non-discrimination, safety; (2) legal norms and interpretation vs. social science and discourse analysis of conflict escalation; (3) media and speech regulation vs. censorship.

The conference is part of a three-year research project of dr. Antoine Buyse on freedom of expression and conflict dynamics, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research.



Venue: Grand Hotel Karel V, Geertebolwerk 1, Utrecht. Room: Graaf Willem IV Zaal

To attend please register by emailing Ms Judith Rippen (J.J.Rippen @uu.nl). Attendance is free, but since only limited places are available, registration means a commitment to attend.

Programme:

9.15-9.45 Registration , Coffee and Tea

9.45-9.55 Opening of the conference

9.55-10.35 Presentation & discussion on the UN Rabat plan of action

- Sejal Parmar (Central European University)

10.35-10.45 Small Coffee Break

10.45-12.30 Underlying Dynamics of Freedom of Speech and Conflict Escalation

- Jonathan Leader Maynard (Univ. of Oxford) - 'Ideologies and Mass Violence: The Justificatory Mechanics of Deadly Atrocities'
- Susan Benesch (World Policy Institute) – 'The Dangerous Speech Model'
- Antoine Buyse (Utrecht University), 'Freedom of Expression and Violence – What Conflict Studies can Teach Lawyers'

Commentator: Lauren Gould (Centre for Conflict Studies, Utrecht University)

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-15.00 Freedom of Expression 'on the Move'

- Lotte Pelckmans (Leiden University), 'Mobile communication and conflict escalation'
- Michael Hamilton (University of East Anglia), 'Freedom of assembly and conflict Escalation'

Commentator: Tarlach McGonagle (Institute for Information Law, University of Amsterdam)

15.00-15.15 Coffee break

15.15-16.45 The Effects of the Media

- Nel Ruigrok (Erasmus University Rotterdam), 'Conflict escalation and the media from a communication sciences perspective'
- George Weiss (Radio La Benevolencija) 'The other side of the coin: countering dangerous speech through the media''.

Commentator: Dirk Voorhoof (Centre for Journalism Studies & Human Rights Centre, Ghent University)

16.45 Concluding Observations

17.00 End of Conference

18.00 Dinner for speakers and commentators