NEWS RELEASE

PeaceTech Lab and Hogan Lovells release new global report addressing challenges of online hate speech.

London and Washington, D.C., 15 December 2020: PeaceTech Lab and global pro bono law firm partner, Hogan Lovells, have published the Global Regulation of Online Hate: A Broad Survey of Applicable Laws.


The Report will be a useful resource for institutions seeking to address the challenges presented by online speech and has been recognized by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minorities.

The third decade of the millennium is witnessing the rampant misuse of online technology. It can be used to bully, to harass and to harm minorities, to radicalize youth, and to instigate violence and terrorism. As social media has grown to new heights, offering a way for billions of people to share information and to entertain and communicate, it has had sinister ramifications too. In certain instances, social media has been the launch pad for misinformation and campaigns of racism and hate of all kinds including incitement to violence and even calls to genocide. The internet has become a tool to promote harmful speech for some ill-intentioned players.

PeaceTech Lab (PTL) is a global non-profit organization created to use the power of technology, data and media to save lives and promote peace around the world. Combating hate speech is a fundamental part of PTL’s work. In order to address online hate, the Lab sought to understand the unique legal environment, how those rules define hate speech, and how countries apply rules to enforce them.

Alongside Hogan Lovells, PTL developed a comparative law survey of regulations governing online hate. A cross-jurisdictional survey of regulatory frameworks has been prepared by a team of over 50 lawyers, with the direction and online speech expertise of partners Christopher Wolf (Washington D.C) and Christelle Coslin (Paris).

The Report reviews:

- Definitions of Hate Speech;
- Bias motivation for Hate Speech and religious exceptions;
- Civil and criminal remedies, and recourse through online platforms; and
- Regulation of media.
This resource provides a baseline in geographies as of December 2020. Going forward, the intention is to develop a map of the findings to provide easier, visual understanding of the national approaches taken.

Christopher Wolfe, Hogan Lovells Partner said, “Striking a balance between online free expression and protecting against the evil effects of hate speech is one of the greatest challenges of our time. In order to craft an effective strategy, it is important to understand the legal approach to controlling hate speech in specific jurisdictions. The survey that Hogan Lovells has prepared for our pro bono client, PeaceTech Lab, should be a useful tool for those focused on ways to moderate hate speech while preserving free expression. Given how hate speech can lead to all kinds of harm, even violence, it is essential to know what tools are available to counter hate speech.”

Sheldon Himelfarb, PeaceTech Lab CEO: "Peace happens at the nexus of just laws, institutions, and the ability to change hearts and minds. The beauty of the Hogan Lovells and PeaceTech Lab partnership is that it enables us to tackle one of the most pervasive destabilizing forces in the world today— online hate speech— and bring to bear both rule of law and the power of social change technology, media, and data. This report underscores the importance of that relationship, as we look to empower peacebuilders, governments, and tech companies around the world with the best tools, policies, and practices."

Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues: PeaceTech Lab and Hogan Lovells have developed a significant new tool to assist those of us at the frontline of protecting the human rights of the most vulnerable targets of hate speech in social media. Minorities in particular are usually at the receiving end of prejudices, racism, and hate. There can be no peace without justice, and this means online hate cannot be allowed to flourish with complete impunity. That is one of the greatest challenges of our times that needs to be better understood and addressed, and the comparative law survey of regulations governing online hate helps us better understand what is in place, and eventually what more needs to be done.

Althea Middleton-Detzner, PeaceTech Lab Director: "One of the biggest challenges in addressing online hate speech is understanding nuanced language in a rapidly changing environment. Language that sounds neutral one day can evolve and take on meaning that can be used to target and harm people the next. That's why PeaceTech Lab works closely with local activists and peacebuilders to identify hate speech and design approaches that address the unique challenges of each conflict context. This report helps us go one step further, by illuminating the policy options available as part of our overall toolkit for preventing and countering hate speech around the globe."

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