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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law

PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CALLS FOR RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF ZIMBABWEAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER BHEKIMPILO MBEDZI

28 July 2026

At a time when fear, misinformation, cybermisogyny and division are increasingly shaping public discourse, organisations from across South Africa came together with one shared message: **hate cannot be allowed to define our democracy.**

The Social Media 4 Peace (SM4P) coalition convened the **#NoToHate Dialogue on Countering Hate Speech and Strengthening Social Cohesion**, bringing together representatives from government, Chapter 9 institutions, civil society, academia, traditional leaders, migrant-led organisations, faith communities, media, digital activist, youth organisations, and international partners to reflect on how South Africa can strengthen social cohesion and democratic resilience ahead of the 2026 Local Government Elections.

The event was held under the UNESCO Social Media 4 Peace project, a global initiative supported by the European Union that seeks to strengthen societal resilience to online harmful content, including hate speech and disinformation, while promoting freedom of expression and access to information. The dialogue took place against the backdrop of growing anti-migrant mobilisation and increasing concern about how these narratives are translating into fear, exclusion, and violence in communities across the country.

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Lauréat 2006 du Prix UNESCO de l'éducation aux droits de l'homme • Winner of the 2006 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education

Participants recognised that South Africans are facing very real challenges: rising unemployment, poverty, inequality, crime, and failing public services have created frustration and uncertainty. However, the dialogue affirmed that these challenges cannot and must not be addressed by blaming “The Other”, migrants or other vulnerable communities.

Scapegoating people who are themselves vulnerable does not create jobs. It does not improve service delivery. It does not make communities safer. Instead, it deepens division and distracts from the difficult but necessary work of finding lasting solutions to South Africa's social and economic challenges.

Throughout the day, participants explored how government, civil society, community leaders, faith-based organisations, journalists, educators, digital platforms, and citizens all have a role to play in preventing hate, promoting dialogue, and strengthening democratic participation.

A key outcome of the dialogue was the sharing of the draft **#NoToHate Declaration on Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience**. Participants are engaging with the draft declaration and proposing additional commitments to ensure that it reflects the realities facing communities across South Africa while remaining grounded in the country's constitutional values. Once finalised, the declaration will serve as a shared call to action, setting out practical commitments to counter hate speech, reject xenophobia and racism, promote responsible leadership, and strengthen democratic resilience ahead of the 2026 elections.

The conversations throughout the day made this clear: building social cohesion is not the responsibility of the government alone. It requires each of us to choose dialogue over division and facts over misinformation.

The Social Media for Peace Coalition thanks every speaker, moderator, partner organisation, and participant who contributed their expertise and ideas. The dialogue demonstrated that despite differing perspectives, there remains a strong collective commitment to protecting South Africa's constitutional democracy and ensuring that everyone who lives in the country can do so with dignity and without fear. As South Africa prepares for the 2026 Local Government Elections, the Coalition calls on all sectors of society to reject hate in all its forms and to actively promote respectful dialogue, inclusion, and peaceful democratic participation.

The work does not end with this dialogue. It begins with the choices we make in our communities, our institutions, our workplaces, and our online spaces every day. Together, we can choose dignity over discrimination. Together, we can say **#NoToHate**.

Social Media 4 Peace (SM4P) Coalition

About the Social Media 4 Peace (SM4P) Coalition

The Social Media for Peace (SM4P) Coalition is a multi-stakeholder network of civil society organisations, academic institutions, media actors, community organisations, and international partners working to promote safer, more inclusive digital spaces in South Africa. The Coalition advances collaborative responses to online harms by supporting research, public dialogue, digital literacy, policy engagement, and community-led initiatives that strengthen social cohesion, protect human rights, and promote peaceful democratic participation.

Through the **#NoToHate** campaign, the Coalition seeks to challenge harmful narratives and foster a society where diversity is respected and everyone can participate safely and with dignity.

- Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria
- Moxii Africa
- South African Human Rights Commission
- Information Regulator
- Research ICT Africa
- Press Council
- Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC)
- South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF)
- Campaign On Digital Ethics (CODE)
- Campaign for Free Expression
- Africa Check

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