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Opening remarks by George Okoth-Obbo, Special Adviser to the Secretary General on the Responsibility to Protect

<u>APPAP / CSIS Training Course on Hate Speech, Disinformation, and Incitement to</u> <u>Violence</u>

2 March 2023, Bandung, Indonesia

Thank you very much for this opportunity to make remarks at the start of this training course on Hate Speech. Most of what I would have wanted to speak to align very much with the questions that will be covered substantively over these two days. I will thus not go over them serially but will limit myself to some contextual themes.

First, allow me to reiterate my gratitude to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, the Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention, and the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect for inviting me to the training and facilitating my participation as you have done.

Hate speech has been employed to fuel and propagate some the most unspeakable abominations that have scarred the history of humankind. The Holocaust. The genocide in Cambodia in which intellectuals, opponents and city dwellers were systematically demonized as the enemies of the people. The genocide in Rwanda against the Tutsi which rode on decades of collective ethnic calumny and dehumanization. The Srebrenica genocide in which systematic nationalist propaganda was deployed to traduce the Bosnian population. The campaign of hate and misinformation loaded with derogatory and dehumanizing language against the Rohingya Muslim minority which has left an enduring trail of death, destruction and the internal and external forced displacement of thousands and millions. And so many others.

Hate speech¹ not only persists today in multiple forms and settings, but it is also rising and spreading at an alarming rate as one of the acutest existential threats to political, social, and

¹ Which, for operational purposes in addressing the issue globally, the UN defines in its Hate Speech Strategy 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 o/FØ Tr\$.0090000.00000912 0 62 92 reWh&24hT/FØ (\$268(2y)9) (265) geaviour that

lawful order and cohesion everywhere around the world and is raising yet again the specter of atrocity crimes for whose deterrence the concept of the Responsibility to Protect was

advantage of it. I encourage you to raise all questions and issues which for you would help you better understand your roles and accountabilities in respect of this issue and the best and most effective ways to deliver on them.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that even in those cases where efforts to prevent, stop and punish hate speech will have been successful, the contagion typically will leave a trail of victims, survivors, and other effects. Victim and survivor support and dealing with broader political and social effects of hate speech are thus particularly important and need to be given priority attention both in actual programmatic and operational action and of course also in learnings of the type taking place today. Thus, even if within the agenda of the event today this aspect may not be specifically provided for, I am hoping that as the