

Strengthening the capacities of religious groups on use of media for inter-religious dialogue

Starting 24th – 25th July, 2019, KAS conducted a capacity enhancement activity in Nyali, Mombasa, for various religious groups and faith based organizations on the different media platforms that exist and could be used to strengthen inter-religious dialogue. The event purposed to raise awareness on the 21st century powerful social media communication tool and how it can be used to counter religious intolerance and improve the fight against violent extremism at the Coast. The Coast region of Kenya has in past and present times been riddled with lots of cases on violent extremism, sometimes stemming from religious intolerance. There is therefore a continued need to harmonize the different religious groups, to promote peace, harmony and tranquility in the region through reduced extremism.



Dhurvi, Gladwell & Maryan teaching the participants on the how to create hashtags on social media



Sheikh Mahamud sharing his experience his role as religious leader in countering RVE

In today's evolving world, social media has emerged as a powerful communication tool that can be used address various issues, including the promotion of peace and harmony among different groups within society. That is why it felt important to have this activity, as part of KAS' continued efforts to promote inter-religious dialogue and tolerance in the Coast Region of Kenya. Through the partnership of KAS and the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC), 20 participants from different religious groups were brought together. These included: The Catholic Church, the Council of Imams and preachers of Kenya (CIPK), African Traditional Religions (ATR) Kaya Tiwi and Kaya Diani, the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK), the Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK), the National Council Churches of Kenya (NCCK), the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) and Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM).

During the event, it was observed that violent extremism expresses itself in the society through different ways such as: Militia groups harassing locals under an umbrella of faith, use of religion for personal gain, acting via an individual ideology of freedom, using positions of power in religion to gain and youths being recruited into militia groups unknowingly. Often, religion is used to propagate some of these vices of inter-religious intolerance among members of the same society. Hate speech was also identified as another major avenue for propagating violence and intolerance among different religious groups within the Coast Region. Thus, to counter this vices, religious leaders were taught about their roles and how they can utilize media as an advocacy tool to eradicate it. Media can be used for example in passing out the right information to the public, running campaigns, issuing press conferences and giving press statements while trying to address and counter violent extremism.

Various ways on how media could be used to counter intolerance and extremism were highlighted as follows: Religious leaders being conversant with the current issues to avoid fake news hence creating a common interest or understanding; Organising press conferences to clarify on any false teachings or misinterpretation of scriptures; Engaging youth in various projects to promote their talents; Organising workshops and seminars on the appropriate use of social media; Clarifying on the misinterpreted verses that made them join extremist groups; Forming youth welfare groups to help each other financially and even spiritually; Using youth-to-youth mentors, especially those who have been de-radicalised to advise their peers against these vices and encourage them to take part in meaningful development initiatives instead.

Finally, the event concluded with the participants appreciating the choice of the theme and the content therein, pledging to continue preaching peace and inter-religious dialogue and tolerance amongst each other through the use of social/media.



Participants keenly listening & taking notes