

21 June 2022

Mr. Simon Walker
Chief, Rule of Law and Democracy Section
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations
Geneva, Switzerland

Via email: ohchr-registry@un.org

Re: Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law

Dear Mr. Walker:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center, one of the largest US civil and human rights organizations, I write to provide this response to your recent call for input regarding the topics to be addressed at the upcoming Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law.

SPLC was founded in 1971. Since that time, SPLC's mission has been to stamp out racism, hate and extremism. Our [Hate Watch](#) and [Intelligence Project](#) divisions conduct the most comprehensive and up-to-date tracking and monitoring of active hate and extremist groups in the US. SPLC is recognized as a national leader on issues of hate and extremism due to its depth of expertise and groundbreaking work.

White nationalism and other forms of far-right extremism present the most serious threat to democracy in many countries around the world, and to the global democratic order. Most governmental resources and political debate devoted to combatting these threats are focused on law enforcement and securitization, such as hardening schools and churches, arming teachers, and increased police presence. For far too long, the urgent need to engage in concerted and sustained prevention efforts has gone largely unaddressed. In many countries, this failure to focus on prevention has allowed reactionary right-wing movements to grow, and to increasingly gain mainstream acceptance.

Fear of changes to the social status quo, in which white people hold a privileged place, has helped fuel the mainstreaming of the myth of the “great replacement” – a term coined by the French author Renaud Camus to identify a conspiracy theory in which white people are being systematically replaced by non-white immigrants at the hands of leftists, “multiculturalists,” Jewish people and others. The myth is central to white supremacist and white nationalist movements and is widespread in Europe and North America. Just since 2018, extremists inspired by the great replacement theory have committed terror attacks in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Christchurch, New Zealand; Escondido and Poway, California; El Paso, Texas; and Buffalo, New York, as well as innumerable other hate crimes. Adherents also fuel anti-immigrant furor that leads to the adoption in democratic states of laws barring migrants fleeing conflicts and disasters in other parts of the world.

The disturbing and dangerous shift toward mainstream acceptance of extremist views is exemplified by the results of a [recent poll](#) of 1500 US residents conducted by SPLC and Tulchin Research – nearly 7 in 10 of those who identified themselves as Republicans agreed at least to some extent that demographic changes in the US are deliberately driven by liberal and progressive politicians to gain political power by “replacing more conservative white voters.” Across the political spectrum, the poll also revealed substantial support for threatening or engaging in violence against perceived political opponents.

As right-wing extremism is increasingly mainstreamed and its adherents attain more numerous and higher public offices, the need to find innovative ways to enable the public – especially young people, parents, and educators – to recognize and be resistant to disinformation and radicalization are more urgent than ever. SPLC, in partnership with American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL), is working to [develop and disseminate tools](#) to inoculate youth against radicalization and build community resilience through early prevention and non-carceral solutions. On March 8, 2022, the SPLC Action Fund submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee a [statement](#) detailing the rise in US hate crimes and outlining critical steps the US must take to combat the rise in hate and extremism, including more funding and support for building community resistance, and expanding rather than curtailing anti-racism education and prevention initiatives. While the current US administration has recently [acknowledged](#) the need to increase efforts aimed at preventing hate and extremism, state legislatures across the US are instead [adopting laws](#) that run counter to such efforts, such as restricting teaching about race and racism in schools.

We propose that a discussion of how States, civil society, and private actors can effectively engage in prevention efforts to combat the further spread and mainstreaming of far-right extremism would be a highly relevant and valuable topic for this year’s Forum. Extremists have become skilled at effective messaging and organization. If we are to curb their ascendancy and “build back better,” the world’s democracies must work together to surpass them.

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SPLC would be honored to contribute to this or any other discussion related to the threats posed by white nationalism and far-right extremism at the upcoming Forum. Please contact me if we can be of service or if you desire any additional information.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Borden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" and the last name "Borden" clearly distinguishable.

LISA W. BORDEN

Senior Policy Counsel, International Advocacy