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Op-Ed

The wildfire of hate speech



By Antonio Guterres,
UN Secretary-General

Around the world, hate is on the march. A menacing wave of intolerance and hate-based violence is targeting worshippers of many faiths across the globe. Sadly - and disturbingly - such vicious incidents are becoming all too familiar. In recent months, we have seen Jews murdered in synagogues, their gravestones defaced with swastikas; Muslims gunned down in mosques, their religious sites vandalized; Christians killed at prayer, their churches torched.

Beyond these horrific attacks, increasingly loathsome rhetoric is being aimed not only at religious groups but also minorities, migrants, refugees, women and any so-called "other". As the wildfire of hate spreads, social media is being exploited for bigotry. Neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements are growing. And incendiary rhetoric is being weaponized for political gain.

Hate is moving into the mainstream in liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes alike - and casting a shadow over our common humanity. The United Nations has a long history of mobilizing the world against hatred of all kinds through wide-ranging action to defend human rights and advance the rule of law. Indeed, the very identity and establishment of the Organization are rooted in the nightmare that ensues when virulent hatred is left unopposed for too long.

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MANAMA: Jared Kushner yesterday called for the Palestinians to accept the "Opportunity of the Century" that he says will pump \$50 billion into a stagnant economy but told them they must first agree if they want a peace deal. Opening the long-awaited Middle East peace initiative of his father-in-law, US President Donald Trump, at a conference in Bahrain, Kushner insisted that the administration has not "given up" on the Palestinians, whose leadership is boycotting the US-led "economic workshop".

"Agreeing on an economic pathway forward is a necessary pre-condition to resolving the previously unsolvable political issues," Kushner said as he opened the two-day event before a gala dinner. In a data-driven presentation in the style of a corporate executive, the 38-year-old adviser to Trump and family friend of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged the need for a political solution.

"To be clear, economic growth and prosperity for the Palestinian people are

not possible without an enduring and fair political solution to the conflict - one that guarantees Israel's security and respects the dignity of the Palestinian people," he said. But Kushner said that the political plan would come later - and that the Palestinians should first embrace the economic component, which promises billions of dollars in investment in infrastructure, tourism and education.

"My direct message to the Palestinian people, is that despite what those who have let you down in the past say, President Trump and America have not given up on you," he said. While dismissing the mocking description of his peace plan as the "Deal of the Century", he quickly offered another label. "This effort is better referred to as the Opportunity of the Century, if the leadership has the courage to pursue it."

Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday the Kuwaiti parliament is defending fateful Arab and Muslim issues, upon which the

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BEIRUT: Palestinians hold placards outside the United Nations headquarters to protest against a US-sponsored Middle East economic conference in Bahrain yesterday. — AFP

No-confidence motion filed against Hajraf; Ghanem warns of 'hidden agendas'

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Ten lawmakers yesterday filed a no-confidence motion against Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf after a quick and surprising grilling debate for refusing to abolish interest on loans taken by pensioners. Following the motion, Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem warned against what he

called "hidden agendas" by some MPs and others who are spreading rumors that the Assembly will be dissolved and that the minister had resigned. The speaker denied both.

Opposition Islamist MP Mohammad Hayef on Monday filed to grill Hajraf, accusing him of not fulfilling a promise to abolish interest on loans taken by

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KUWAIT: Opposition Islamist MP Mohammad Hayef gestures during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Tehran to ditch more nuke curbs as Trump warns of 'obliteration'

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday it will further free itself from the 2015 nuclear deal in defiance of new American sanctions as US President Donald Trump warned the Islamic republic of "overwhelming" retaliation for any attacks. Tensions between Iran and the US have spiralled since last year when Trump withdrew the United States from the deal under which Tehran was to curb its nuclear program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

The two archrivals have been locked in an escalating war of words since Iran shot down a US surveillance drone in what it said was its own airspace, a claim the US vehemently denies. On Monday, Washington stepped up pressure by blacklisting Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and top military chiefs, saying it would also sanction Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif later in the week.

Tehran was defiant yesterday, saying the new US sanctions against Iran showed Washington was "lying" about an offer of talks. "At the same time as you call for negotiations you seek to sanction the foreign minister? It's obvious that you're lying," President Hassan Rouhani said. Rouhani, a pragmatist who won two elections on promises to open Iran up to the world, said the White House's actions were "mentally retarded" - an insult that other Iranian officials have used in the past about Trump, but a departure from Rouhani's own comparatively measured tone over the years. "Tehran's strategic patience does not mean we have fear," he said.

A top security official said Iran would "resolutely" abandon more commitments under the nuclear deal on July 7. Iran had announced on May 8 that it was suspending two of its 2015 pledges and gave Europe, China and Russia a two-month ultimatum to help it circumvent US sanctions and sell oil or it would abandon two more commitments.

"As of July 7, Iran will forcefully take the second step of reducing its commitments" to the nuclear deal, Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was quoted as saying by Fars news agency. This was so "countries who

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Expat workers face new tests, transfer curbs

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The manpower authority issued a number of decisions to regulate the presence of expat workers in Kuwait, namely those doing technical jobs as per their work permits. Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqel said the regulations will limit all forms of manipulations and eventually put an end to visa trafficking.

"The manpower authority has set very strict measures including banning the change of a worker's profession or educational level except through certain measures," Aqel said, adding that in case of changing professions to become an educator for persons with special needs, a worker will be subjected to specific tests, a measure that will be later applied to other professions.

Aqel said special tests are being currently set for 20 technical jobs and crafts and stressed that the conditions to be followed include commitment to the qualification degree and specialty, the activity practiced, passing the set tests and having the required certificates of experience. Aqel added that transfers will be allowed within the same sector from one technical profession to another based on certain regulations regardless of the educational level or degree, if a worker had entered Kuwait as a technician or craftsman.

Aqel explained that professions for which workers will be subjected to tests initially include auto mechanics, electrical technicians, safety and security supervisors, pipefitters, land surveyors, aluminum technicians, welders, turnery operators, advertisement and publicity representatives, salesmen, irrigation grid technicians, steel reinforcement workers, construction carpenters, asphalt lab technicians, purchase officers, accountants, librarians, legal consultants and legal clerks. Aqel explained that in case a worker desires to change their profession, they will have to depart and return with a new work visa matching the degree they want to use for work.

Homeless Syrians sell furniture to survive

ATME, Syria: For years, Abu Ali sold used furniture and home appliances for a living. But he never thought Syria's war would one day make him homeless and force him to sell his own. His family is one of dozens stranded in olive groves along the Turkish border, who say they have had to sell their basic possessions to ensure survival. "I sold them to provide food, drink and clothes for my children," said the father of five, who now houses his family in a tent.

An opposition bastion in Syria's northwest

has come under heavy regime and Russian bombardment since late April, despite a truce deal intended to protect the jihadist-run enclave's three million inhabitants. The spike in violence in and around Idlib province has killed hundreds of civilians, displaced 330,000 more, and sparked fears of one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the eight-year civil war.

Abu Ali, his wife and their children fled their home in southern Idlib in early May, hitting the road north to seek shelter in the relative safety of the olive groves close to the border. "I used to have a shop to buy and sell used items," such as fridges and furniture in the village of Maaret Hurma, he told AFP, sitting in the shade of a tree near the border town of Atme.

A few days after fleeing his home village, he hired two trucks for 50,000 Syrian pounds (over \$110) to bring "eight fridges, bedroom furnishings, seven washing machines, and sev-

eral gas stoves" up to the olive grove. But under the summer sun in the makeshift camp, the merchandise soon plummeted in value. "I was forced to get rid of it or sell it - even at a very low price," the 35-year-old said, his chin stubble already greying under a head of thick dark brown hair.

For example, the going price for a fridge originally bought for 25,000 Syrian pounds (more than \$55) can be as low as a fifth of that price. In Atme, some families have stored their fridges and other appliances in a single tent to protect them from the elements. Outside, a top-loader washing machine sits in the shade of a tree.

Awad Abu Abdu, 35, said he too was forced to part with all his household items for a pittance. "It was very dear to me. It was all I had accumulated over a lifetime of hard work," said

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ABYAN, Syria: Displaced Syrian men ride with their belongings in a truck as they head to sell them on the outskirts of this Syrian town in the rebel-held western Aleppo province on June 13, 2019. — AFP