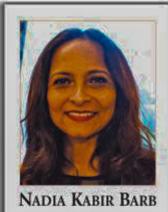


Free Speech: The murky waters of perspective



NADIA KABIR BARB

Is cyber bullying a freedom of expression or is it just bullying? Is using a platform such as social media or a public forum to attack a group based on their gender, race, religion or sexual orientation, freedom of speech or is it just propagating hate?

The concept of freedom of speech or expression can throw us headlong into the murky waters of perspective. The definition of free speech is deceptive; it appears relatively straightforward and clear cut – free speech is the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, by any means without fear of government retaliation or censorship. In other words, there should be no limitations to freedom of speech. The writer in me would argue that curtailing, curbing or censoring free speech is an infringement of rights and therefore non-negotiable.

The pragmatist in me, however, might beg to differ and say that freedom of speech should not be absolute unless it can be exercised responsibly. Though people ought to have the right to express their opinions without fear of persecution or censorship, it does not give us the licence to say whatever we want, whenever we want and to whomsoever we want. It would be naive to believe our words do not have consequences, therefore, we need to exercise our judgement as to what is acceptable given that we coexist in a society.

In the current socio-political climate, there is pushback against what is considered out of control political correctness and liberal sensibilities in the political arena, news and social media. Often this takes the form of expressing opinions that are both extreme and at times incendiary. We need only look to the US to see that the recently elected President Donald Trump has consistently exercised his right to free speech by making statements that are inflammatory, bigoted and frequently untrue.

Recently an event organised by PEN America, thousands of writers, authors and artists congregated in New York and across the country to send a message to the US President and his administration who they feel "has laid bare its hostility toward the press and other free expression norms." PEN America is a non-profit organisation working

towards defending freedom of expression. On January 21, the Women's March in Washington and similar marches around the world took place to protest Donald Trump's politics of fear and divisiveness. An estimated 2.9 million women and men participated to stand up for the protection of fundamental rights, gender and racial equality and the safe guarding of freedom.

Last year, the name Milo Yiannopoulos would have barely registered on my radar - or on most people's for that matter. Recently, however, he has managed to catapult himself into the media limelight surrounded by one controversy after another.

subscribe to the brash, bellicose behaviour adopted by the president. With friends in high places such as David Bannon, former executive chair for Breitbart News recently appointed by Donald Trump as Chief Strategist to the White House, Yiannopoulos has become the poster boy for white supremacist ideology. He too is taking advantage of his right to free speech and cashing in on his notoriety.

The most recent media storm to engulf Yiannopoulos and create outrage is his highly lucrative book deal with Threshold Editions, an imprint of the publishers Simon and Schuster. He is reported to have received

ideas should be debunked and discredited, not censored."

Not everyone is in agreement with this sentiment. An open letter published earlier this month by 160 authors and illustrators, protesting the book deal states that, "This is not an issue of advocating or suppressing free speech, as Mr. [Milo] Yiannopoulos has a broad internet broadcasting platform and the support of many extremist organisations and publications ... His voice is certainly being heard, and it is a voice of hate that stirs its followers to emotional, verbal, and physical violence directed at anyone who disagrees or speaks to the contrary."

Turkey, award winning journalist Ahmet Sik was detained by the police for several tweets and articles where he was accused of writing terrorist propaganda and denigrating the Turkish Republic. Previously, in Myanmar, speaking out against the government was grounds for imprisonment. It appears that little has changed with the new democratic government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. Myo Yan Naung Thein, Secretary of the ruling party's Central Research Committee, has been detained without bail since November of 2016 for allegedly criticising the Myanmar army on social media.

In recent years, Bangladesh has also seen its freedom of speech and expression coming under increasing censorship with free thinkers, bloggers, activists, writers, publishers, academics and religious figures coming under attack. Some have had to live in exile to avoid further persecution. Tragically, others have even paid with their lives. Ahmed Rajib Haider, Xulhaz Mannan, Professor Rezaul Karim Siddique are just few of the victims of extremist violence. Rather than condemning these attacks and bringing the perpetrators to justice, the government has suggested that restraint should be used when exercising the right to free speech especially with regards to derogatory comments about religion. We also have in place the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act which casts a wide net and can proscribe online publication of material which is considered to be false, of an obscene nature, detrimental to law and order and negatively portrays the image of the State or hurts religious belief. This is also a prime example of the infringement of freedom of speech and expression. The moment we have governments dictating what is acceptable and what is not, the essence of free speech is lost.

In an ideal world, freedom of speech and expression would be absolute but we live in a flawed world where it is neither without its limitations nor without consequences. Whether we are idealists or realists, we have to accept that there are those who choose to abuse their right by spreading hate and others who choose to use their position of power to restrict and silence voices of dissent. As George Washington said, "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter."

The writer is a freelance columnist based in the UK. Her short stories have been published in international arts and literary magazines and an anthology.



IMAGE: PINTEREST

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Yiannopoulos, a senior editor at US-based Breitbart News, known for its support of the 'Alt-Right' organisation and backing of far-right views, has made it his life's mission to push boundaries and offend almost every section of society. He has stated that transgender people are 'mentally ill', associated Islam with 'rape culture', and asked his followers "which would you rather your child had: feminism or cancer?" His trolling of Ghostbusters actress Leslie Jones and incitement of others to follow suit had him banned permanently from Twitter last year.

A fervent Trump supporter, he appears to

an advance of USD 250,000 for his book which spreads hate speech.

That he is exercising his right to freedom of speech and expression does not detract from the fact that mainstream publication of this book legitimises vitriolic and dangerous ideologies. The publisher, Simon and Schuster, has also been widely criticised for profiteering from a book that advocates such extremist views with many calling for a ban of the publication. The demand for the ban has been condemned by free speech organisations such as Pen English. According to Robert Sharp, Head of Campaigns and Communications for Pen English, "Offensive

Sharp, however, goes on to say that "PEN campaigns for the victims of censorship in many countries around the world. Often, the people we seek to support have been branded as 'dangerous' or corrupting to society. If we seek to silence people like Milo Yiannopoulos on the same grounds, then we set a terrible example to more authoritarian governments."

To put things in perspective, Saudi writer, activist and dissident Raif Badawi was arrested and sentenced to prison for ten years and 1,000 lashes for "insulting Islam" in 2014. So far, he has received 50 lashes and is awaiting the remainder of his sentence. In

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Breaking the WHO's glass ceiling

PETER A. SINGER and JILL W. SHEFFIELD

THIS year, the World Health Organisation will elect a new Director-General. Last September, WHO member states nominated six candidates for the position: Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Flavia Bustreo, Philippe Douste-Blazy, David Nabarro, Sania Nishtar, and Miklós Szócska. On January 25, the WHO Executive Board will shortlist three candidates; and in May, the World Health Assembly will elect one of those candidates to succeed Margaret Chan.

All of the candidates have presented a vision for how they would lead the organisation, and we personally know and admire several of them. But, ultimately, we believe that Ghebreyesus is the most qualified person for the job. Our endorsement is based on three considerations that are important in any hiring process, and especially for a position such as this: the candidate's past achievements, leadership style, and the diversity that he or she brings to the table.

With respect to the first consideration, Ghebreyesus has a proven track record of success. As Ethiopia's health minister from 2005 to 2012, he championed the interests of all of the country's citizens, and strengthened primary-care services. He created 3,500 health centres and 16,000 health posts, and dramatically expanded the health-care workforce by building more medical schools and deploying 38,000 more community-based health extension workers.

Ghebreyesus's efforts now serve as a model that other countries seek to emulate as they try to achieve universal health coverage for their citizens. He is the only candidate who has achieved such results at a national level.

Ghebreyesus is also a long time champion and

advocate of gender equality and the rights of women and girls. In fact, his efforts to strengthen Ethiopia's health system played a crucial role in more than doubling the percentage of Ethiopian women with access to contraception, and in reducing maternal mortality by 75 percent.

When Ghebreyesus was Ethiopia's foreign

cooperative action on collective health challenges. Ghebreyesus's leadership style is also perfectly suited for this role: he speaks last, and encourages others to share their views. He also knows how to spot and nurture talent, and how to bring the best out of the people around him. He would undoubtedly boost organisational morale and

leadership experience within global health institutions. As Board Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria between 2009 and 2011, and as Chair of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership between 2007 and 2009, Ghebreyesus pushed through sweeping changes that dramatically improved both organisations' operations. What's more, he helped them raise record-breaking financial commitments from donors: USD 11.7 billion for the Global Fund, and USD 3 billion for Roll Back Malaria.

This is precisely the kind of experience and expertise that the WHO needs in today's global health environment, and it explains why the African Union has officially endorsed Ghebreyesus's candidacy. Amazingly, in its almost 70-year history, the WHO has never had a Director-General from Africa. This fact alone is not a reason to pick a candidate; but in Ghebreyesus's case, his direct experience working in developing countries makes him uniquely qualified to tackle our toughest global health problems, which tend to hit developing countries the hardest.

It is time to break the WHO's African-leadership glass ceiling. Sustainable development is truly achievable only when leaders of global institutions are from the communities most affected by those institutions' work.

Ghebreyesus's candidacy presents the WHO with an historic opportunity, which its Executive Board should seize on January 25.

The writers are Chief Executive Officer of Grand Challenges Canada, and an independent consultant and longtime advocate for women's health and rights.

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World Health Organisation's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

minister from 2012 to 2016, he gained extensive diplomatic experience, not least by leading negotiations for the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the international community's plan to finance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This same knack for diplomacy is now needed to bring WHO member states together for

motivate the staff to deliver maximum value and efficiency – to the benefit of all member states and their citizens. And while he is a receptive listener, he is also decisive, which is an attribute for the leader of the world's foremost health institution, especially during global public-health emergencies.

Then there is Ghebreyesus's extensive

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QUOTABLE Quote



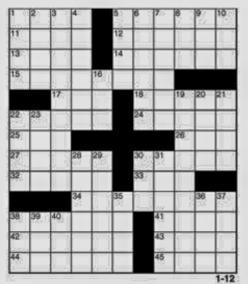
AMARTYA SEN

INDIAN ECONOMIST AND PHILOSOPHER OF BENGALI ETHNICITY

Human ordeals thrive on ignorance. To understand a problem with clarity is already half way towards solving it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Piccolo's cousin | 1 Greek cheese |
| 5 Old antacid | 2 Golf club |
| 11 Amorous archer | 3 They relieve barking dogs |
| 12 Slow passage | 4 Think highly of |
| 13 Tugboat sound | 5 Loft setting |
| 14 Fresh start, as of a movie series | 6 Worthy aims |
| 15 Radio receivers | 7 Goes by taxi |
| 17 Arthur on TV | 8 In the past |
| 18 Boosts | 9 Carnival spot |
| 22 Scoundrel | 10 Web crawler |
| 24 Small porch | 16 Carpet feature |
| 25 Fortune | 19 Rural walks |
| 26 Man-mouse link | 20 Matador's foe |
| 27 Impromptu | 21 Health resorts |
| 30 Some singers | 22 Do in |
| 32 Kind of question | 23 Body of law |
| 33 Wee drink | 28 Like some training |
| 34 Paleolithic time | 29 Weevil's target |
| 38 Sizzling strip | 30 Curry on TV |
| 41 Sirius or Polaris | 31 Deceives |
| 42 Book worker | 35 Rowing needs |
| 43 Ruffian | 36 Old France |
| 44 Clothing store section | 37 Therefore |
| 45 Norwegian city | 38 Handful of |
| | 39 Flurry |
| | 40 Athlete Thorpe |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

GLOB SCRIMP
RAVE QUINOA
OVEN USMAIL
WAR EASE
TILDE OPT
STICK SAVOR
HARE LENO
EXERT NERDY
DIS EJECT
FLAW UMP
TUVALU ARIA
AMAZON LENT
PATENT ASKS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

