

# LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP: CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROACHES FOR PREVENTING MASS ATROCITIES

## MODULE 5: Deeper Dive: Dangerous Speech OR Community Dialogues



UNITED STATES  
**HOLOCAUST**  
MEMORIAL  
**MUSEUM**



## MODULE 5: DEEPER DIVE: DANGEROUS SPEECH OR COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

This module is intended to supplement Module 4: Before Mass Atrocities: Criminal Justice Tools for Prevention. Instructor may explore one of two topics with participants related to early warning and prevention in more depth (option A or option B). Both options aim to further participants' understanding of their role as criminal justice professionals in mass atrocity prevention and to better equip them with tools to recognize and address warning signs before mass atrocities occur.

Option A: Tools for Addressing the Warning Sign of Dangerous Speech introduces the concepts of dangerous speech and hate speech and allows participants time to reflect on their lawful role in addressing these types of speech in their own context. The distinction between dangerous speech and hate speech is described in the module's script below. Participants may share the laws and policies of their own country/community surrounding hate speech. This option also includes a case study to encourage participants to consider strategies for protecting freedom of expression while preventing violence and addressing this warning sign for mass atrocities.

Option B: Community Dialogue as a Tool for Prevention introduces participants to community dialogues as a tool for preventing mass atrocities. Where applicable, participants are invited to share their own experiences engaging in community dialogues. Participants then analyze a short video profiling a community dialogue in Burkina Faso. Participants are introduced to an atrocity risk assessment framework as a tool for considering key actors to be included and core grievances to address in a community dialogue.

### Guiding questions for this module

- Option A: How can criminal justice professionals effectively respond to warning signs such as dangerous speech while still preserving basic rights such as freedom of expression?
- Option B: How can criminal justice professionals use community dialogue as a tool for prevention?

### Module objectives

- Option A: Participants gain a basic understanding of what qualifies as dangerous speech and how these topics intersect with early warning.
- Option A: Participants analyze how certain speech can escalate into acts of violence and reflect on their own roles and capabilities when addressing dangerous speech.
- Option B: Participants gain a basic understanding of what a community dialogue looks like and explore this as a possible tool for prevention.
- Option B: Participants are able to share with each other their own experiences (where applicable) with holding community dialogues or pursuing other forms of community engagement, and exchange strategies for effective communication with community members to mitigate violence.

## MODULE 5: DEEPER DIVE: DANGEROUS SPEECH OR COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

Module length: 30 minutes

SEGMENT	LENGTH
Introduction	1 minute
Option A: Dangerous Speech OR Option B: Community Dialogue	27 minutes
Conclusion	2 minutes

### Required materials

- Module #5 PowerPoint
- Module #5A or #5B Handout
- Video clips
  - [“What Is Dangerous Speech?” video](#)
  - [“Stopping Hate Speech” video with Adama Dieng](#)
  - [“Saaba: A Dialogue in Process”](#) (Burkina Faso Community Dialogue)

### Further reading

- Key Resource: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [Guide to Criminal Justice and Preventing Mass Atrocities](#), Chapter 3 (2023)

### Dangerous Speech and Hate Speech

- Dangerous Speech Project, [Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide](#) (updated 2021)
- European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Centre for Judicial Cooperation, [Freedom of Expression and Countering Hate Speech, Handbook on Techniques of Judicial Interaction in the Application of the EU Charter](#) (2020)
- The Future of Free Speech Website, [Hate Speech Case Database](#) and other resources on regulating speech and preserving freedom of expression
- United Nations, [Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) (2019)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (with Rachel Brown), [Defusing Hate: A Strategic Guide to Counteract Dangerous Speech](#) (2016)
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Freedom House, ABA ROLI, Internews, Global Rights, [Preventing Atrocities: Five Key Primers](#) (2014)
- United States Department of State, [2022 Roadmap for the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse](#)

### Community Dialogue

- Discover Policing Website, [“What Is Community Policing?”](#) and [“Resources”](#)
- Rausch, Colette. [“The Justice and Security Dialogue Project: Building the Resilience of Non-State Actors to Atrocity Crimes.”](#) *AJIL Unbound* 113 (2019): 273–78.
- Search for Common Ground, [Community Dialogue Design Manual](#) (2016)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [Early Warning Project](#)
- United States Institute of Peace Website, [“Justice and Security Dialogues: USIP Brings Communities Together to Strengthen the Rule of Law”](#)
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and United States Department of State, [Atrocity Assessment Framework](#) (2015)

## LESSON PLAN

### Option A: Tools for Addressing the Warning Sign of Dangerous Speech (30 minutes)

#### Introduction (1 minute)

*Slides 1–2*

**Explain:** “We will now explore in greater depth a topic related to criminal justice tools for preventing mass atrocities—dangerous speech.

“In this session, we will cover the following topics:

- Discuss dangerous speech and hate speech
- Analyze how certain speech can escalate to acts of violence
- Reflect on your roles and capabilities when dealing with dangerous speech and hate speech

“There is a balance when it comes to speech—protecting the right to freedom of expression and preventing violence and mass atrocities. The hope is for outreach and pre-incident prevention by paying attention to dangerous speech and hate speech.”

#### Dangerous Speech Discussion and Case Study (27 minutes)

*Slides 3–9*

##### Defining Terms: Dangerous Speech and Hate Speech Discussion

*Slides 3–5*

**Say:** “Let’s start by defining terms. What do we mean when we talk about *dangerous speech* and *hate speech*, and how does this intersect with the right to freedom of expression?”

Instructor should read the excerpt from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding freedom of expression on slide 3 and the definitions of dangerous speech and hate speech on slides 4 and 5.

Note: When sharing the definition of hate speech, the instructor may wish to highlight for participants that while this represents the UN definition of hate speech, it is not intended as a legal definition—definitions of hate speech for the purpose of criminal prosecutions may vary by country. Participants will be given the opportunity to discuss their own criminal statutes surrounding hate speech in the discussion listed on slide 7.

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Instructor can invite participants to review the two definitions of dangerous speech and hate speech and discuss how they are similar or different. This can prepare participants for the film on slide 6, which discusses both terms in greater depth. Whether the term *dangerous speech* or *hate speech* is used in a particular context, *the key question for atrocity prevention is whether the speech act can increase the risk of violence against another group.*

### *Slides 6–8*

Instructor should introduce the film clip on slide 6 by sharing that the film will explain the similarities and differences between hate speech and dangerous speech and will discuss why it is important to be able to identify both. After playing the film clip, the instructor may select from the following questions to lead a short discussion (*Discussion time: 10 minutes*):

**Ask:** “Have you encountered dangerous speech or hate speech in your own context? What would be an example of hate speech? Can you share an example of dangerous speech?”

Note: Instructor should start with asking for examples of hate speech, because they may be more familiar or obvious (such as referring to a group as “vermin”). Then ask about examples of dangerous speech to help tease out that it can apply to any group, including those we don’t typically think of as a target of hate, such as certain professions or social classes (journalists, teachers, “elites,” working class, the homeless).

Instructor may draw on the example of the Rohingya from Module 1 by sharing that one of the most widespread examples of anti-Rohingya hate speech is the claim that Rohingya are not native to Burma. This false claim has been used to inspire policies aimed at revoking Rohingya’s citizenship and to justify violence against them.

Instructor may also wish to highlight the gendered nature of hate speech—for example, that women and LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly politicians and journalists, tend to be targets of this type of hate speech and dis/mis-information campaigns. Some of these examples may be legal or illegal under domestic laws.

**Ask:** “Are you familiar with any domestic laws regarding speech, either hate speech or dangerous speech? Do you have laws relating to freedom of expression?”

**Ask:** “Do you collect information on hate crimes and bias incidents? At what point would you take action?”

Instructor may wish to determine ahead of time whether course participants have some knowledge of the hate speech law that they could share through this discussion. Depending on how much prior awareness there is among participants, the instructor could retrieve the domestic hate speech law and provisions on freedom of expression in advance (if one exists) and share it with the class and point out some of the questions one would ask regarding how the laws help address atrocity risk.

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**Ask:** “How do you balance freedom of expression (as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) with the need to address dangerous speech and hate speech in your own context?”

Instructor may wish to highlight the following key points in the discussion:

- Importance of checking your own biases (What are you basing your decisions on? How have your own views affected your decisions?)
- Tools to counteract dehumanization, such as community engagement or dialogue
- Distinction between hate crimes and bias incidents (hate crimes may or may not be recognized as distinct crimes under domestic laws, but they involve crimes motivated in whole or in part by bias or prejudice against a person’s identity (racial, religious, gender, disability, or other); bias incidents do not rise to the level of a crime, but are also motivated in whole or in part by bias or prejudice against some aspect of a person’s identity)
- In countries that have hate speech laws, consideration of how the hate speech laws help address dangerous speech and whether there are some forms of dangerous speech the laws would not cover
- Importance of proactively addressing problems before they grow larger by having data (e.g., tracking bias incidents or other relevant data regarding the safety of vulnerable groups)
- Prevention that may include engaging the group to de-escalate rhetoric and trying to keep them within the law
- Importance of empathy toward the targeted group—educate the public on the law while being sensitive to the fact that something may offend or be hurtful to someone even if it is legal

During or while wrapping up the discussion, the instructor should reinforce

- Whether the term *dangerous speech* or *hate speech* is used in a particular context, *the key question for atrocity prevention is whether the speech act can increase the risk of violence against another group.*
- If the answer is yes, the next question is, What lawful tools or approaches can be used to reduce the risk while upholding freedom of expression? What guidance does the law provide? If the speech is unpleasant but legal, what steps might you take to promote prevention? (These ideas may be explored in greater depth during the case study discussion that follows too.)

### Case Study: Addressing Hate Speech Incidents

*Slide 9*

**Say:** “We will now take a closer look at a case study about hate speech to discuss possible ways criminal justice professionals can address hate speech incidents.”

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Instructor should share the handout with the case study and allow participants a minute or two to read the scenario. Instructor leads a discussion using the following prompts (*Discussion time: 10 minutes*):

### Ask:

- “Describe the situation.
- How would you handle the demands for action by the community and politicians?
- What could happen as a result of your actions?”

Instructor should address the following points in the discussion:

- Community education and partnerships as a possible approach to address this incident. This could include outreach to the targeted community to better understand their concerns, offer them direct points of contact within the justice system, and consider additional ways to improve safety and protection while the community’s concerns persist. This could also include gathering more information about the group distributing brochures to understand their organization better, promoting legal awareness with the community as a whole regarding what activities are permitted and not permitted, thus signaling to the group distributing brochures that the justice system is aware of their activities.
- Could this behavior escalate to more than brochures in the future? If so, how?

### Additional Discussion (if time permits)

**Say:** “The same group has multiple members who begin posting and interacting on social media with similar comments and speech. Some members post on government and other openly public social media.

- Does this change anything? Do other laws apply?
- What guidelines exist with respect to monitoring social media?
- Under what circumstances or conditions could you investigate this further?”

### Conclusion (2 minutes)

*Slide 10*

Instructor should share the video from Adama Dieng highlighting the connection between hate speech and mass atrocities (genocide, crimes against humanity, etc.).



## Option B: Community Dialogue as a Tool for Prevention (30 minutes)

### Introduction (1 minute)

*Slides 11–12*

**Explain:** “We will now explore in greater depth a topic related to criminal justice tools for preventing mass atrocities—community dialogues.

“In this session, we will cover the following topics:

- Discuss community dialogue as a tool for atrocity prevention
- Analyze a community dialogue in terms of a mass atrocity risk assessment framework
- Reflect on your roles and capabilities for reducing atrocity risk through community dialogues

“When done right, a community dialogue can address several risk factors and form part of a process of early warning analysis and atrocity risk assessment.”

### Community Dialogue Discussion and Exercise (27 minutes)

*Slides 13–15*

*Slide 13*

**Say:** “Let’s start by defining terms. A *community dialogue* is an initiative in which criminal justice professionals, such as the police or a prosecutor’s office, open channels of communication with the community.”

**Ask:** “Have you ever participated in a community dialogue? What was your experience with this tool?”

Note: This is an opportunity for the instructor to surface participants’ existing expertise on the topic of community dialogues. Opening the conversation with an invitation to participants to share their own experiences encourages a participant-centered discussion in which they can share ideas about this tool and other mass atrocity prevention tools with one another. (*Discussion time: 5 minutes*)

### *Slide 14*

Instructor should inform participants that they will now be analyzing a case study of a community dialogue in Burkina Faso. They will view a 12-minute video about the community dialogue. Instructor may provide the following context for the video:

**Say:** “This town’s population grew rapidly and crime rose dramatically, particularly theft and break-ins. The police force was overwhelmed, and people took justice into their own hands, with tragic results. Local authorities, police, and informal security groups could barely speak to each other. In 2016 a series of community dialogues brought together stakeholders (from security, local authorities, local nonstate security groups, and civil society).

“As you watch, keep a list of who is participating and why their participation may be important for understanding and reducing atrocity risk.”

### *Slide 15*

After the video ends, the instructor may select from the following questions to lead a group discussion (*Discussion time: 10 minutes*):

**Ask:** “Who is participating in the community dialogue? Is there anyone you were surprised to see in this dialogue? Why might their participation be important?”

Possible answers: Instructor can highlight the diversity of participants (e.g., medical student—thinking about importance of including future leaders; mother with baby on back at the end—importance of diversity and gender balance) and also the range of justice representatives—from formal (police and gendarmes) to religious leaders and the local chief.

The following participants are present in the film:

- Koglweogo (local self-help group—paramilitary)
- Islamic leader on behalf of the Muslim community
- Chief’s representative
- Police officers and gendarmes
- Social worker
- Business owner (identified in video at 6:11)
- Forestry officer (identified in video at 6:18)
- Activist (identified in video at 8:57)
- Medical student (identified in video at 9:16)
- Balai Citoyen, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that is funded by the US Institute of Peace, is facilitating the dialogue—presence of international actors and human rights NGOs

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**Ask:** “Is there anyone whose participation might make the dialogue more complicated or inhibit mass atrocity prevention efforts?”

Possible answers: Participants may note the inclusion of the Koglweogo—a militia group—in the dialogue and may discuss the benefits and challenges of their inclusion.

**Ask:** “How might an effort like this help criminal justice professionals better understand and evaluate risk for mass violence against civilians?”

Possible answers: Participants may note the changes identified in the film as a result of the dialogue:

- Less fear of security forces (5:08)
- Easier to approach them (5:10)
- Koglweogo used to beat people to death for alleged crimes, but now they understand what can and cannot be done (5:18)
- Koglweogo have a better understanding of the police and how to work effectively with them (8:12)
- Police get more information from the community (9:00)
- The various groups have made good connections (9:07); they understand and know each other better (9:12)
- Increased trust in each other (10:59)
- More able to communicate issues with each group in the future (11:09)
- The groups are now sharing the same goals (11:23)
- They respect each other and know their respective roles (11:25)

### Conclusion (2 minutes)

*Slides 16–17*

**Say:** “Links to both the 2008 and 2022 versions of the US Government Atrocity Assessment Framework are included in your handout. The framework includes identification of key actors who might play a role either in preventing or mitigating mass atrocities or in facilitating them. It also includes consideration of core grievances that drive atrocity risk. As you think about using community dialogue as a tool in your own context, you may wish to use the framework to determine who needs to be included in the dialogue and which core grievances are the most critical to address.

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“The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum also has an Early Warning Project that analyzes risk factors for mass atrocities in individual countries. You can visit the website (link included in your handout) to see the ranking for Burkina Faso and compare the information in the report with the information you saw in the video. You can also see the ranking for your own country as well as which risk factors are identified. You can use this as a resource to inform your own prevention work.

“The use of a tool such as community dialogues sets an important foundation for mass atrocity prevention work: no one operates alone, and nothing is achieved in isolation. The more we can build meaningful bridges between different community players, the stronger our prevention efforts.”

Cover: A USIP Justice and Security Dialogue in Jos, Nigeria,  
Dec. 18, 2019. *US Institute of Peace*