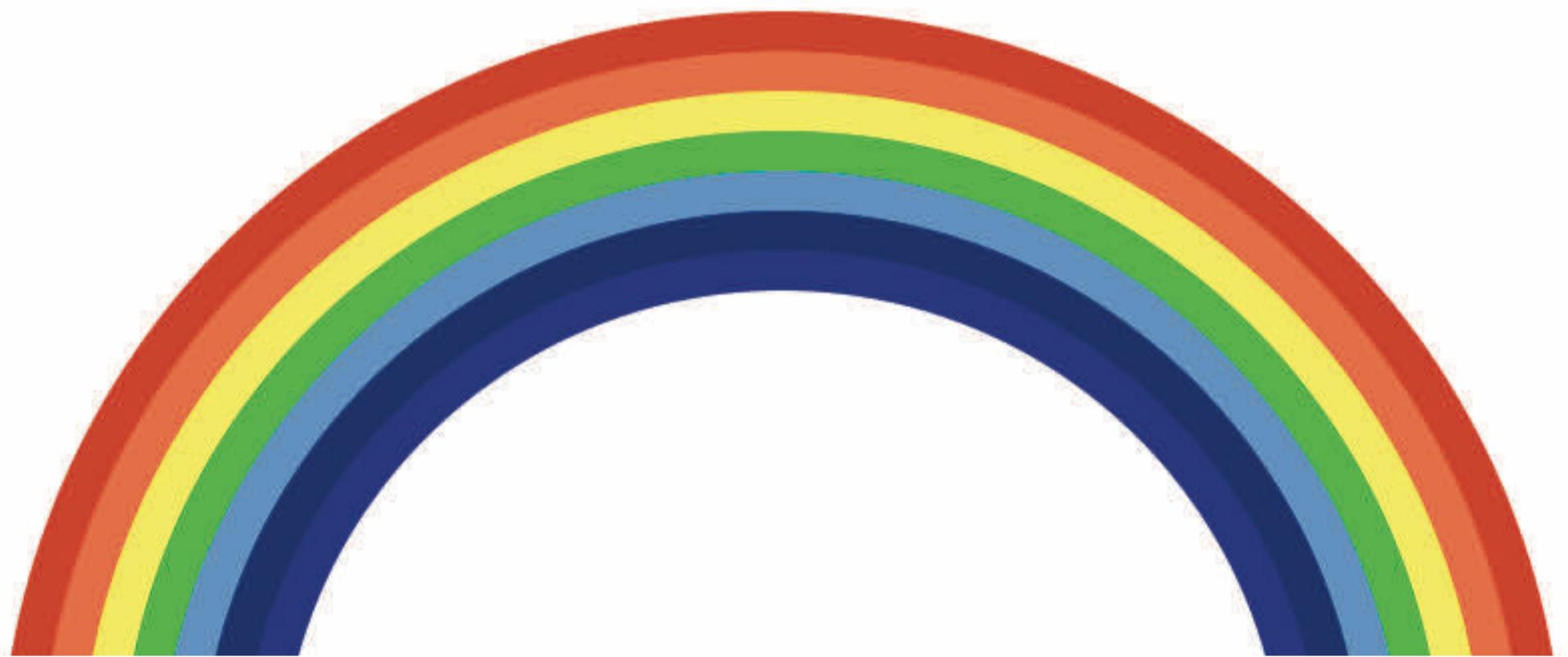


# Daily Fake News

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## Corona virus: The pandemic which ended sectarianism



While the world has observed social distancing for over a year now, communities previously divided in sectarianism have been brought closer together than ever before.

By Peter Positive

Over a year on from the initial outbreak of the corona virus, communities have united across sectarian divides in the provision of relief efforts for the most vulnerable and marginalised, in a remarkable display of social solidarity across previously divided religious denominations.

Religious minority communities have been brought together over the course of this global pandemic, and through working with one another to coordinate the delivery of food parcels and other basic provisions, the long-held stigmas of the religious other; the "dirty" "unknowable" "horned" "blasphemer"; have been well and truly quashed in confrontation with a common humanity.

While the world has observed social distancing for over a year now, communities previously divided in sectarianism have been brought closer together than ever before.

In the context of this community understanding and solidarity, there has also been a marked decrease in the

incidences of online hate speech targeting religious minorities - partially on account of increased unity offline in response to the pandemic, and also due to the efforts of social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, who, in response to international pressure from the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) among others, have now been taking their monitoring obligations seriously.

Following the lobbying efforts and mass recruitment of youth activists with a firm ear to the ground, any hate speech or incitement to violence is removed within 24 hours, thanks also in part to a new advanced machine-learning algorithm, which monitors and responds to evolving trends in online hate speech.

The Pew Research Center's latest statistics illustrate the impacts of this, with a drop by more than 80% in incidents of online hate speech leading to offline violence since this time last year.

But it is not just marginalised minority communities that have transcended divides to help one another through the corona pandemic. In a bold move the British people have called upon their government to show solidarity with poor

religiously marginalised people around the world by supporting their access to personal protective equipment (PPE), including through the provision of 3D printers. This follows the success of the international campaign raising awareness of the plight and conditions of sanitation workers globally by highlighting cases such as Pakistan, where sanitation workers, primarily minority Christians and Hindus, had been forced to work cleaning hospitals, streets and sewers without any PPE. The campaign, which led to a furore over spiking prices limiting access for marginalised groups to necessary PPE, has had the full support of the British public and government.

Further, while lockdown measures may have physically separated communities, they have provided both means and stimulus to unite disparate diasporas, creating large online religious communities coming together in celebration and support, as well as galvanising people to come together globally across religious, ethnic, class and other divides to interrogate the true roots of inequalities within their societies. The collective challenge of COVID has led to mass cross-community organisation to stamp out sources of

inequity and hate once and for all, championing a global call and campaign for a zero-tolerance policy to all who propagate hate, building on the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement, to call for the reconstruction of a diverse, religiously inclusive and socially cohesive global society of empowered citizens, all with a voice and platform to hold governments and powerful groups to account.

In line with the observed downward trend of online hate speech since this time last year, from the UK to Pakistan to Nigeria, outbreaks of communal violence have also markedly decreased as a more tightly interwoven social fabric is knitted in response to the pandemic, and as collective community organisation for positive change is seen as the only rational path forwards in response to a global health emergency which has superseded formerly entrenched sectarian divides.

The corona virus has presented unprecedented challenges to humanity globally - and humanity has responded by coming together to help each other in need, regardless of creed.

*Disclaimer: This article is fictional. It was developed to provoke discussion & debate at the webinar "What can be done to address religious inequalities in post-COVID transition?", organised by CREID in June 2020. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the programme.*

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