

**OSCE MEETING ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACIST,
XENOPHOBIC AND ANTISEMITIC PROPAGANDA ON THE INTERNET,
AND HATE CRIMES**

Session 2

‘ONLINE PROPAGANDA AND THE COMMISSION OF HATE CRIME’

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Mr Chairman,

I work primarily for the Community Security Trust, which provides defence and security services for the Jewish community in the UK. Part of our research during the past fifteen years has been on how antisemitic extremist groups, neo-nazi, Islamist radicals, and others, promote hatred of, and plan offensive activity against the Jewish community.

Increasingly we are able to ascertain what these extremists are planning by accessing the Internet.

We accept that the development of cyberspace has facilitated the growth of new forms of hate groups and that it allows cheap accessible communication which avoids legal restrictions and which is capable of being encrypted.

We know that there has been an explosion of websites, that they promote hatred, and that there is an alarming increase in religious and racial tension, including violence, directed at many minorities, but particularly the Jewish communities. What we must now do is begin to examine the relationship between such sites and violence on the streets. We should also analyse the development of the command and control mechanisms that cyberspace allows.

The websites are, in effect, a showcase of wares; they promote the hate groups' ideologies and allow them to advertise themselves. These groups also now increasingly use cyberspace to organise themselves and their activities. I would suggest that the next important growth is not in the use of websites as such but rather in the internal and restricted access sites. And it is the racist, xenophobic groups which use them the most. That is the neo-nazis and the white supremacists.

Radical Islamists inciting religious hatred are also major users.

Governments have recognised that such sites may breach criminal codes and some prosecutions both of the owners of hate sites and the senders of hate mail have taken place, notably in France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Britain and Australia.

The law has been catching up with the promoters of hate online as a result of political pressures: cyberspace no longer operates in the lawless vacuum, which its early proponents intended, and which the hate groups above all others have campaigned for but the focus of the few prosecutions has been on the websites only. The commonly held view of the neo-nazi groups is that

they are relatively unsophisticated mindless thugs. The reality is that they are the generation that has grown up in a digitised world and see the greater potential for cyberspace than did their predecessors. They communicate in cyberspace ever more frequently, and effectively.

They use the Internet for planning action, such as the organisation of demonstrations, sometimes violent; for fundraising; for the recruitment and introduction of new members.

The email contact lists and the Internet relay chatrooms allow the posting of messages and a proper exchange of information within selected groups. Even allowing for the possibilities of exaggeration by some posters and the fact that some use anonymiser services, or otherwise hide their identities, it is still possible to see that these forums are increasingly used for the organisation of activities.

The riots in northern English cities in 2002 were in part organised online by the neo Nazi British National Party and National Front. So were the same groups' violent demonstrations outside the North London Mosque in Finsbury Park over the past eighteen months.

Redwatch in Britain and the Anti Antifa sites in Germany publish hit lists for their members of prominent anti-fascist campaigners and journalists, and assaults on them take place as a consequence.

In all these examples it is possible to trace the link between the postings and the ensuing violence.

At an international level, the Holocaust Denial conferences held in Italy in 2001 and 2002 were organised almost completely online, and the monitoring of the sites, among other means, allowed the Italian authorities, when alerted, to take action against them. The organisers of a new planned international network of white supremacist groups that signed the New Orleans Protocol on 29 May 2004 stressed in their declaration that:

“The Internet is our communication salvation in the face of increasing minority control of mainline means of communication as well as increased state censorship.

Observation of chatroom exchanges show clearly how ideology is developed and spread. The British National Party's change in focus from that of an openly neo-Nazi street-based group to its reincarnation as an anti-immigrant political campaigning force has been carried out considerably online. And the White Nationalist Party, a north of England-based breakaway from the National Front, has developed its ideology completely online.

Fundraising for many groups, in Britain and the USA, now takes place online. In a recent posting the activities organiser of the British National Front thanked supporters for funding their election campaign in which they raised the bulk of their funds online.

Government agencies and NGOs have now become adept at monitoring hate sites. Regular reports which describe the contents are published both in hard

copy and online. The ADL and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre reports are among the foremost. A US Justice Department publication investigating Hate Crime on the Internet examines cases of hate-mail sent online.

What is now required is a series of further studies nationally and internationally on the use of closed sites. Investigations should be aimed at gaining intelligence on planned activities by extremists in order to frustrate their plans. It should be used for the wider intelligence purpose of establishing the operational links that exist between these groups. And It should be used for criminal prosecutions where the link between the message and the act of violence is provable. There may be jurisdictional and investigative problems in this process but they are not insurmountable.

This becomes a more urgent and pressing requirement as Internet usage grows.

The OSCE questionnaire sent to member states at the end of March sought responses to a wide range of important questions. Unfortunately there was insufficient time between then and now for more than 23 states and the EC to respond. It is to be hoped that the other 32 will do so at the earliest opportunity, and that the OSCE will publish their replies as well.

Responses received so far indicate a tremendous growth in Internet usage, and particularly among young people. While most responding states have legislation that forbids incitement or discrimination few report the establishment of specialised law enforcement units, or indeed even an awareness that cyberspace provides the most dynamic and cheapest medium by which to incite, organise and fund hatred.

Just a few however recognise the problem. Let me quote from two of the responses.

The Dutch reply states that:

'By and large anti-Semitism for example, has shifted from In Real Life publications to the Internet'.

The Russian Federation states:

'In particular, the Internet is being used by terrorist organisations for propaganda of terrorist ideas, separatism and religious extremism, as well as involving people in the activities of such organisations and providing financing.'

In summary therefore I would urge member states to recognise that hatred is increasingly organised on line, as well as being showcased on line.