

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

B'nai Brith Canada hosted an International Symposium on Hate on the Internet from September 7-9, 1997 in Toronto, Canada. One hundred invited participants, including government and police officials and representatives of the fields of law, human rights, computer technology, academia, education, and community action, engaged in an in-depth exploration of hate on the Internet for the purpose of drafting recommendations designed to counter this growing phenomenon. The participants gathered from across Canada and from the United States, England, Germany, Israel and Australia for this unprecedented, three-day event.

Background and Purpose

The International Symposium on Hate on the Internet was planned and implemented under the auspices of the Institute for International Affairs and the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada. The Institute for International Affairs has a mandate to protest the abuse of human rights throughout the world and to advocate on behalf of Jewish communities in distress worldwide. It alerts government and community officials of threats to human rights worldwide and assists in policy development. The League for Human Rights is dedicated to combatting racism and bigotry in all their forms. The objectives of the League include improved community relations, the elimination of racial discrimination and anti-Semitism, and the promotion and protection of human rights for all Canadians.

Several years ago, B'nai Brith Canada's Annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents highlighted the issue of hate on the Internet, and the threat it poses to human rights, thereby bringing the issue to the attention of the Canadian government as well as the international human rights arena. Alerted to this growing problem, the membership at the 1995 Annual Meeting of B'nai Brith Canada unanimously passed a resolution to create a joint task force of the Institute for International Affairs and League for Human Rights. The purpose of the task force was to monitor hate on the Internet, with a view to proposing effective guidelines to the CRTC and other relevant government agencies, and to developing educational anti-hate materials to counter the impact of hate on the Internet.

The tremendous increase in hate propaganda on the Internet since that time and the lack of a systematic, structural and inter-jurisdictional approach to hate speech on the Internet were the driving forces behind the organization of the International Symposium on Hate on the Internet. The past few years have marked a dramatic increase in the use of electronic technology throughout the world. Ironically, hate mongers were among the first to realize the tremendous power of the computer to spread their hatred without boundaries. While the Internet is an important tool for the promotion of human rights and democratic values on a global scale, its abuse by hate mongers and extremists gives them a degree of influence that far outweighs their numbers. The League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, as well as the Hate Crimes Unit of the Metropolitan Toronto Police, and the Anti-Defamation League in the United States have all attributed the recent decrease in overt anti-Semitic incidents and hate/bias crime to the rise of hate on the Internet, as it has replaced some of the