

The World Joins Forces for Hate On The Internet Symposium

By *Natasha Greenberg*

TORONTO -- For three days in September, "the world" came together in Toronto to discuss and debate the issue of cyber-hate. Participants in the International Symposium on Hate on the Internet, sponsored by B'nai Brith Canada, came from Germany, Australia, and all across continental North America to wrestle with an issue that continues to confound law makers, technicians, educators and philosophers.

The Symposium began

with fireworks, as the heads of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the American Civil Liberties Union went head to head with a German Kriminaldirektor from Baden-Wurtemberg, a Professor of Law, and the Executive Vice President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. The audience of approximately 100 people were given the opportunity to participate, ask questions, and respond to the panelists, setting the tone of expertise mixed with give and take that marked the three days.

The significance of the issue of hate on the Internet was reaffirmed Sunday night with presence at a reception of not only the international experts, but members of every level of Canadian government, all of whom praised the initiative, and acknowledged the issue as a serious one.

By Monday, participants had launched fully into the programme, participating in plenaries as well as smaller workshops. The first workshops dealt in broad strokes with the technological, philosophical, and legal/legislative aspects of the issue of cyberhate. The lunch address was given by the well known author and academic in the area of Holocaust studies and Holocaust denial, Deborah Lipstadt. Afternoon workshops dealt with more specific topics, and gave all participants the opportunity to really contribute their feelings and expertise.

The Symposium was attended by a large component of police and RCMP officers, who were engaged in closed sessions that allowed them to really wrestle with the issues that are specific to their line of work. Again

and again they repeated that hate activity on the Internet, like hate activity in other forms, is not a victimless crime. They are more than anyone aware of this, and want to make sure that this fact is not forgotten.

One of the most productive aspects of the Symposium was the opportunity it provided for networking and the forming of connections. By the second day, like-minded participants had found each other and were developing contacts that would extend far beyond the three days, to create a kind of international network to combat hate on the Internet. While there was no consensus on the issue of regulation of the Internet, the debate that occurred produced all involved to really consider the basis of their position on the issue at hand. So successful was this effort that participants voted almost unanimously to reconvene in 18 months to see where these connections had led, and what concrete results had come of them.

The proceedings of the conference and the recommendations that came out of it will be available in the near future.

Internet law criticized

The Criminal Code should be amended so Canada could prosecute offenders who transmit hate material on the Internet from outside the country, Alan Adel, vice-chairman of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith, told an international symposium in Toronto yesterday. A legal solution to the issue would likely be more realistic than trying to screen out offending Web sites, Mr. Adel said. Although the Canada's Criminal Code prohibits the dissemination of hate material in the country, the Internet is oblivious to international borders. — CP

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