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**Submission to the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition
to Combat Antisemitism
Media Awareness Network / Réseau Éducation-Médias**

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Technological advances such as personal computers, the Internet and wireless devices have changed the face of hate speech, providing hate groups with greater reach, a mask of anonymity, and new ways to appeal to youth. According to Professor Errol Mendes from the University of Ottawa “the new information technologies, and especially the Internet, create some of the greatest challenges and opportunities to be faced by those whose occupations and lives are devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights and the protection of the vulnerable in all societies.”¹

Christopher Wolf, the Chair of the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) Internet Task Force and the Chairman of the International Network Against CyberHate (INACH) calls the Internet “a powerful and virulent platform for anti-Semitism hate towards Jews that has a direct link to violence, terrorism and the deterioration of civil society. Hitler and the Nazis could never have dreamed of such an engine of hate.”² Wolf’s statement is echoed in a study published in *Analyses of Social*

¹ Errol P. Mendes, *Human Rights and the New Information Technologies: The Law and Justice of Proportionality and Consensual Alliances*. (2007) <http://www.cdp-hrc.uottawa.ca/eng/publication/centre/infotech.php>

² Christopher Wolf, *The Internet is Making Anti-Semitism Socially Acceptable*. London Conference on Combating Anti-Semitism. (February 16, 2009) http://www.adl.org/main_internet/C_Wolf_London_Conference.htm

Issues and Public Policy in 2003, which showed that the Internet is a significant factor in allowing extremist groups who promote hatred to spread their messages and recruit new members.³

The ability Internet tools give hate groups to indoctrinate and recruit new members is particularly concerning when one considers the amount of unsupervised time children and teens spend online. A 2005 survey of 5,200 Canadian students by Media Awareness Network showed that two out of every ten students have come across a Web site that promotes hate towards a particular group or individual.⁴ (Note that this figure only includes sites that display their hate content overtly: more common are sites such as martinlutherking.org, a disinformation site operated by the white supremacist group Stormfront that attempts to discredit the late Martin Luther King.) Moreover, one-third of students' favourite Web sites noted in the study contained violent content. For example, newgrounds.com one of the top sites for boys in Grades 8 to 11, contains content that ranges from harmless but offensive, to violent and cruel, and in some cases, hateful.⁵

The rapid growth in popularity of Web 2.0 technologies, such as social-networking sites and user-generated video sites, has helped to fuel an explosion in online hate content. The ADL noted in a recent article that social networking sites have become a place where anti-Semitic misinformation is harboured and spread. On the sites such as *MySpace* and *Facebook*, for example, there are hundreds of groups featuring the words "Hitler" or "Nazi", many established to promote neo-Nazism and anti-Semitic attitudes.⁶

The U.S.-based Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that 12,000 white supremacist propaganda videos and Holocaust denial pseudo-documentaries are openly available on video-

³ Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, Diana R. Grant, Chau-Pu Chiang, "Hate Online: A Content Analysis of Extremist Internet Sites." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003, pp. 29-44

⁴ Media Awareness Network, *Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Student Survey*. (2005)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anti-Defamation League, *Anti-Semitic 9/11 Conspiracy Theories Abound on Social Networking Sites*. (September 10, 2009) http://www.adl.org/main_internet/Anti-Semitic_911_Conspiracies.htm

sharing Web sites.⁷ These postings have one purpose: to provoke hate and to recruit haters – particularly young people, who are the main users of these sites.

Nor is online hate confined to Web sites: hate groups have successfully used media such as video games and "white power" music to appeal to youth, and the Internet allows these to be distributed worldwide.⁸

Although racist and hateful comments are offensive to the vast majority of Canadians, they are not necessarily illegal, and prosecuting online hate speech has had limited success in Canada. A recent report to Parliament by the Canadian Human Rights Commission pointed out the limitations of trying to respond to online hate speech through the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.⁹ Within the current system, accusations of hate are made to the Commission, which then decides whether or not the information will be passed on to the Tribunal for further investigation and dispute resolution. While the Tribunal may force a respondent to cease and desist from communicating hate, compensate an identified victim or pay a penalty,¹⁰ the Tribunal does not have the ability to imprison those deemed guilty of communicating hate. Moreover, what power the Tribunal does have to respond to online hate may be severely curtailed: on September 2 of this year Athanasios D. Hadjis of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that Section 13 violates the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.¹¹

A common approach to protecting youth from inappropriate online content is the use of filtering and blocking software. Often these programs are marketed to parents and schools with the promise of monitoring activities and limiting children's ability to access offensive and illegal material. Although many of these programs are successful in blocking sexually explicit content,

⁷ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Sharing the Hate, Video-Sharing Websites Become Extremist Venue* (2007) <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=756>

⁸ The best-known hate music producer is Resistance Records, a record label and online store that labels itself Pro-White. The organization, which is in subsidiary with the National Alliance, promotes hatred and discrimination through the sale of music, magazines, video games, and clothing. <http://www.resistance.com/>

⁹ Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Special Report to Parliament: Freedom of Expression and Freedom from Hate in the Internet Age*. (June 2009) http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/srp_rsp_eng.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, *Ruling of the Marc Lemire Case*. (September 9, 2009) <http://www.chrt-tcdp.gc.ca/aspinc/search/vhtml-eng.asp?doid=981&lg=e&isruling=0>

according to *Consumer Reports*, which tests popular filtering software, they are not very effective at blocking sites promoting hatred -- especially when presented with disinformation on "stealth" hate sites such as the false Martin Luther King site noted earlier.¹² Moreover, filtering programs are largely ineffective at blocking content that is contained in games, music or other non-text media or that is accessed through peer-to-peer downloading networks.

Because hate groups promote their message through misinformation, propaganda and appeals to bias and emotion, a more effective response to protecting youthful Internet users is a media literacy approach based on critical thinking.

The *Third International Symposium on Hate* held by the Institute for International Affairs and League for Human Rights (a branch of B'nai Brith Canada) brought together many different individuals - including those in the law enforcement, government, legislative, industry, educational and community sectors of society. Recommendations from the symposium called for increased efforts to promote media literacy "not just for children and teenagers, but also for parents and other caregivers, as well as the broad spectrum of

educators – both formal and informal – who need to be able to understand and navigate the medium of choice for the youth of today."¹³

Media literacy education has been proven to be effective in mitigating potential negative media influences on the physical and mental well-being of children and youth. For example, several studies have indicated that media literacy lessons incorporated into standard curriculum can help reduce potentially harmful effects of TV violence on young viewers. In one study, third- and fourth-graders who were given a course in media literacy decreased their time spent watching TV and playing video games and reduced their use of verbal and physical aggression as judged

¹² ComputerReports.org, *Filtering software: Better, but still fallible*. (June, 2005) <http://www.consumerreports.org/>

¹³ B'Nai Brith, *Recommendations following the 3rd International Symposium* (2006) <http://www.hateontheinternet.com/Recommendations-CommunityEducation.php>

by their peers.¹⁴ Other studies have concluded that media literacy interventions can help high-risk youth develop more responsible decision-making skills in their own lives.¹⁵

A media education approach to online hate is particularly important when it comes to reaching youth, who are the primary targets of hate recruiters. The popular media culture – television, music, videogames, magazines and the Internet – is a significant influence in the daily lives of children and young people. What they see and hear in media helps to form their perceptions of the world and who and what is valued in our society.

Media Awareness Network provides Canadian schools with education resources and programs on Internet hate. These programs help students understand the legal definition of hate; how the Internet facilitates dissemination of hateful materials; and how to report hate if it is encountered. At the same time, these materials also explore a “spectrum of hate” – ranging from putdowns to racist humour – that exists online and in popular culture, and how this spectrum may desensitize youth to intolerance and hate. Students are encouraged to examine how their own online activities could influence peer attitudes, reinforce negative stereotypes and promote “othering.”

The online hate resources, developed with the support of Canadian Heritage, include professional development workshops for teachers and interactive games and lesson plans for the classroom. They are currently used by school boards and facilities of education across Canada. The resources have received significant international attention, particularly in Europe, as many countries struggle to address rising anti-Semitic and racist activities. Between 2005 and 2007 MNet was invited to present a Canadian education approach to Internet hate at four European conferences organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on the topic of *Racist, Xenophobic and Anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet*; at the INACH conference in Germany on *Promoting Tolerance and Non-Discrimination on and through the Internet*; and at the Dutch Complaint Bureau against Discrimination on the Internet Amsterdam conference on *Discrimination on the Internet: Does education have the future?*

¹⁴ Thomas Robinson et al., “Effects of Reducing Children’s Television and Video Game Use on Aggressive Behavior,” *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* 155(2001)1:17-23.

¹⁵ Jane Moore, Neal DeChillo, Barbara Nicholson, Angela Genovese, and Stephanie Sladen, *Flashpoint: An Innovative Media Literacy Intervention for High-Risk Adolescents*, *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* (Spring 2000)

In 2008, Media Awareness Network was invited to join a Justice Canada working group examining the feasibility of a Canadian tip line for reporting online hate. Working group members included Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations, Canadian Human Rights Commission, Canadian Race Relations Foundation, Canadian Association of Internet Service Providers, RCMP, Cybertip.ca, and other stakeholders. There was unanimous agreement among the members that public and school-based education must be an essential component of any effective strategy to address online hate.

As current methods for addressing racist and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet prove ineffectual, experts in the field increasingly believe that the most effective response to preventing the spread of hate dialogue and youth recruitment by hate groups through the Internet, is education, and in particular media and digital literacy. As the Ontario Hate Crimes Community Working Group noted in its 2006 report to Ontario's Attorney General "hate is not intrinsic to human beings; it is a learned behaviour which can be unlearned."¹⁶ An educational response that emphasizes awareness, empathy and responsible citizenship and equips individuals to think critically and take action, is an important first step in addressing the growing issue of anti-Semitic and racist messages on the Internet.

We urge the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism to recognize media and digital literacy as a critical element of any multi-faceted strategy put into place to address anti-Semitism, and we encourage the Government of Canada to continue its support of the development and dissemination of awareness and education programs for Canadians addressing Internet hate.

Media Awareness Network / Réseau Éducation-Médias

Media Awareness Network/Réseau Éducation-Médias (MNet) is a Canadian, not-for-profit centre for media and digital literacy. Its vision is to ensure that children and youth possess the necessary critical thinking skills and tools to understand and actively engage with media. It is noted for its balanced programs, rooted in an education framework and supported by Canadian

¹⁶ Hate Crimes Community Working Group. *Addressing Hate Crime in Ontario. Final Report of the Hate Crimes Community Working Group to the Attorney General and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.* (2006) http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/hatecrimes/HCCWG_full.pdf

research. The majority of MNet's resources and programs are a public asset, available in both official languages in urban, rural, remote, northern and Aboriginal communities.

MNet's membership comprises individuals and organizations representing the public, non-profit and private sectors. Membership is approved by the Board of Directors.

Since the mid-1990s, MNet has pioneered the development of media literacy responses to issues such as racism, intolerance and online hate. Its work in this area has been praised and referenced by many organizations, including B'nai Brith Canada, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Anti-Defamation League, Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and UNESCO. In 1999, the Canadian Race Relations Foundation awarded MNet its inaugural Award of Excellence for its groundbreaking programs and resources to educate young people about Internet hate and issues relating to media representation of race.