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OSCE Meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and Anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes, Paris, 16 – 17 June 2004

Statement by Mr. Nimrod Barkan
Head of the Delegation of Israel
1 Session

Mr. Chairman, esteemed heads of delegations,

We have gathered here to confront one of the most acute dilemmas facing us at the outset of the Twenty-First Century. We are called upon to calibrate our fight against the proliferation of hate material on the internet while at the same time remaining true to one of the key values, if not **the** key value, in maintaining and fostering democratic society; **free expression and the free exchange of ideas.**

Israel is well aware of this dilemma. We are the only functioning democracy in the Middle East, and the public debate in our country is robust, to say the least. However, we are also cognizant that there is a line which separates politics from hate.

We are concerned, though of course not exclusively, with the ever growing presence on the World Wide Web of anti-Semitic sites. Whether we are dealing with Neo-Nazi groups who promote an agenda of so-called White Supremacy or Radical Islamic groups, many of whom are tied to international terror, we are forced to confront humanity's oldest hatred in its most modern form. Let us be clear, these sites **do not** promote the free exchange of ideas envisioned by the fathers of the Enlightenment. They **do** encourage genocidal hatred towards Jews as well as others and constitute a clear, present and imminent danger to society.

I refer specifically, but not exclusively, to web – sites such as:

Radio Islam

Let me be clear, **our fight is not with Islam**, but rather with those, who in the name of Islam, **have chosen to designate the Jewish People and the State of Israel as the primary cause of the World's problems, and preach the destruction of the Jewish People as the remedy for the World's ills.**

Another site worth mentioning is:

Jew Watch

This site is a veritable encyclopedia of hatred. It contains scores of headings such as:

Jewish Genocides, Jewish Hate-Groups, Jewish Spies et cetera....

There is also:

The Christian Party

This site contains a whole section entitled (the) “Talmud – Destroying Christian Culture”. Of course there are many other sites which are similar in content.

Be assured, we also look to our own house, in order to make sure that sentiments which are racist, and engender inter-ethnic strife and hatred are not publicized in the media or on the internet in Israel.

The State of Israel has, therefore, enacted laws prohibiting incitement on the basis of religion, ethnicity, race or national origin, and they are enforced. Cases of incitement on the grounds mentioned above are dealt with by an inter-ministerial committee composed of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the State Prosecutor’s Office and the Police. An investigation of alleged incitement in the mass media may only be initiated by the Attorney General of Israel himself and not by any subsidiary body. On the one hand we are aware of the serious and imminent negative implications which racist and xenophobic incitement has for society and civil peace. On the other hand by empowering **only** the Attorney General to open investigations of this sort we acknowledge that any infringement upon the freedom of speech must be implemented with the requisite gravitas.

While it is important for these phenomena to be investigated and exposed, their perpetrators must also be tried and punished. The Judiciary must also do its job. Hate-mongers cannot continue to engage mass propaganda without having to pay a price for it.

In the realm of international cooperation in the field of law enforcement, I wish to note that Israel participates actively in the G-8 24/7 Computer Crime Network and we were present at the last meeting which was held in Rome in March, 2004.

Israel is presently studying the Convention on Cybercrime along with the additional protocol “Concerning the Criminalization of Acts of a Racist and Xenophobic Nature Committed Through Computer Systems”. Our preliminary impression of both of these documents is favorable and we believe that they can form a firm legal basis for combating hateful incitement, including anti-Semitism on the Internet.

Mr. Chairman,

It was the renowned poet John Keats who wrote “Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know”. After the horrors of the Twentieth Century we all in fact know better. That which is aesthetically appealing may in fact be lies, and that which is true may not be all that attractive. The greatest orgy of mass murder in human history, the Shoah, was engendered by a mighty propaganda machine, which in fact harnessed the then prevalent forms of mass communication, radio and motion picture films, in an aesthetic and powerful manner.

Then, we were dealing with mass communication in its infancy. **Today**, with the Internet, we are dealing with a phenomenon unparalleled in all of History. Instant communication is

possible, to all points on the globe, at minimum cost. Some of the most abhorrent web sites are actually most aesthetic; conveying the image of serious academic research with “up to the minute” information.

When approaching the Internet, perhaps instead of Keats we should keep in mind the words of the Ecclesiastes, written some 2500 years ago: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is worthless”.