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VIEW FROM THE WEST AND BEYOND

Review finds 7,000 vile Internet sites -- and numbers are growing

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BRITISH Muslim Abu Izzadeen, born Trevor Brooks, is seated at a table joking cynically about a journalist who was kidnapped by terrorists in Iraq a couple of years ago.

The reporter had pleaded for his life.

"You journalists will be taught," harangues the bald-headed, bearded, white-robed Izzadeen, who was once a bodyguard for Omar Bakri Mohammed -- the leader of Al-Muhajiroun, a group that lauded the 9/11 hijackers as the "Magnificent 19" and who has joked about the London subway attacks of July 7, 2005.

This clip of Izzadeen, which was posted on the popular Internet site YouTube in September 2006, was one of several chilling scenes shown during an enhanced power point presentation -- Digital Terrorism & Hate -- at the Delta Hotel downtown recently by Leo Adler, the director of national affairs, Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies.

Compiled by the centre's researchers in Los Angeles, Toronto, Jerusalem, Paris, New York and Buenos Aires, this 10th annual report was available on CD-ROM, it includes over 600 sites "culled from almost 7,000 problematic websites, blogs, newsgroups, YouTube and other on-demand video sites," a jump of almost 17 per cent over 2006.

"The Internet has many attributes and wonderful things. But there is a minority of individuals and groups that are using the Internet to truly create havoc in society whether it's through hate, terrorism or creating situations of instability," Adler said in an interview.

Adler added that terrorists have no respect for life and that's why journalists are now being deliberately targeted everywhere, not only in the Middle East.

"It began with *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl being murdered (after being kidnapped) in Karachi, Pakistan in February 2002, and continues to this day," he said.

Adler pointed to the killing of a 50-year-old Japanese man, a video journalist, Kenji Nagai, working for Tokyo-based video and photo agency APF News, in Burma during the disturbances against the military junta a couple of months ago. The Australian Broadcasting Agency reported that he was the first foreign victim of the unrest.

"Burmese officials said he was killed accidentally. However, Japan claimed that footage of the shooting smuggled out of Burma indicated that a Burmese soldier shot Nagai deliberately at close range," *Guardian Unlimited* said online on Oct. 8.

Adler also observed that Internet sites are being used to "pre-announce" acts of hate or terrorism. For example, he pointed to the 18-year-old man in Tuusula, Finland, who shot dead seven students and the principal before killing himself at his high school on Nov. 7.

"Now investigators in Finland are searching for connections to the shooter and a possible motive in YouTube postings that appeared to reveal plans" for the deadly attack, said Adler quoting from a newspaper article.

"There is something that's quite common when you get into the computers of people who commit atrocities in schools. You find that what they, invariably, have been doing are being involved in websites that promote violence, and which make violence appear to be a game."

Many of those "games" have a way of making blood and gore look natural. A U.S. site called Border Control is filled with cartoon characters sneaking into the U.S. from Mexico. A player can take aim and shoot them dead for points. Equally ugly is a site promoting suicide bombers. Little figures scurry through a street scene while another character explodes in their midst with devastating results. The more individuals you kill, the higher your points total.

We also watched a scene from a vile and violent anti-gay game.

There are the numerous neo-Nazi and white supremacist websites. One clip had a well-dressed David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and a Holocaust denier. In a calm voice and appearing inside a book-lined studio, Duke looks presentable and almost scholarly.

"Thank God for the Internet. You can find out about my message without a controlled media," says the notorious hatermonger.

Adler told of a naïve high school student in Burlington, Ont., who had an assignment on the Holocaust. With no guidance from her teacher, she wrote her essay based on information found on a website set up by hatermonger Ernst Zundel -- who was deported from Canada to his native Germany in March 2005 where he was convicted this year on 14 counts of inciting racial hatred and defaming the memory of the dead. He was sentenced to five years in prison.

"She became convinced that the Holocaust never occurred. We contacted the school about this and ultimately they thanked us," said Adler.

Despite the increase in hate and terrorist sites on the Internet over the past decade, Adler remains optimistic.

"People are more aware of these sites and governments are taking a strong stand. But the heart of all this is going to be to try and get those countries that either support terrorism or are ambivalent to it to reverse their stands," he said.

Martin Zeilig is a Winnipeg freelance writer.