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Hatred weaves evil new web

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Simon Wiesenthal was a famed Holocaust survivor and Nazi hunter.

Now, the organization that bears his name continues the hunt -- not just for old Nazi war criminals but neo-Nazis, jihadists, terrorists and all other big-time hatemongers.

In the global launch yesterday in Calgary of its 10th annual Digital Terrorism and Hate report, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's researchers in Los Angeles, Toronto, Jerusalem, Paris, New York and Buenos Aires unearthed more than 7,000 hair-raising websites -- an increase of almost 17% from 2006 -- that foment and nurture hatred and even teach wannabe terrorists how to build bombs and carry out suicide bombing attacks.

TACTICS AND TRENDS

"Today, the Internet not only facilitates hate, violence and terrorism, its technological engines shape and even dictates tactics and trends deployed by groups committed to destroying our democratic values," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the SWC, based out of Los Angeles.

The massive CD-ROM report highlights 600 sites from those 7,000 including ones that were run out of Canada and have since been shut down, thanks to the Canadian Internet Providers Association that almost immediately kills such sites upon learning of their existence.

But, as Cooper pointed out in a meeting room at Calgary's Westin Hotel, there are no walls or borders where the Internet is concerned.

Canadian kids are being infected with hatred "into the culture of death" via the Internet, often without their parents or siblings knowing it's happening.

Cooper points to the 17 youths arrested last summer in Ontario who allegedly devised plans to behead the prime minister and blow up Parliament.

While all attended the same storefront mosque in Toronto, they also participated in Internet chat rooms and frequented terrorist websites.

A couple of weeks ago, a three-and-a-half minute video posted on YouTube, for instance, provided detailed instructions on how people frustrated about the slow progress made with Native land claims in Canada can disrupt train traffic in potentially deadly ways. The anonymous video, which has since been pulled, was produced by a group describing itself only as "The Railway Ties Collective."

Cooper says Canada's hate laws provide a good balance between the right to freedom of expression and protecting society from the "virus" of hate.

The report also highlights a rather professionally made al-Qaida real-time terrorist video that shows young men first being recruited and then driving an explosive-filled van and cement truck in Iraq, ending with the suicide bombing that blew up a hotel, killing numerous innocent people.

VIRUS SPREADING

"Back in 1995, at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing, we found one hate website on the Internet," pointed out Cooper. "Last year we found 6,000 and this year there were more than 7,000."

In other words, the virus is spreading.

"The Simon Wiesenthal Center is not attacking the Internet, but we need to have our eyes wide open," says Cooper, who warns parents, teachers, legislators and police to be vigilant.

The late Simon Wiesenthal spent his life seeking "justice not vengeance" as he hunted Nazis. Somehow, that still unfinished task seems almost simple today.