



## **Report sees online hate growing, experts urge parents to discuss negative impact of digital hate with children**

**TORONTO, ONTARIO - June 8, 2010 -**

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC), in Toronto, hosted Rabbi Abraham Cooper to lead a panel discussion on the role the internet plays in online hate, intolerance and racism, and to introduce the 2010 version of *Digital Terrorism and Hate*, an annual study on these topics. Now in its thirteenth year, the report uncovered more than 11,500 different hate sites - a 20 per cent increase over last year's study.

"Hate thrives in underexposed environments, especially with youth," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean from the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center. "The best way to counter the spread of hate is to bring it to light through education and dialogue with today's youth."

The annual report from Simon Wiesenthal Center confirms that hate has a strong presence on the internet and terrorist groups are improving their ability to train and inform youth through social networking sites. Yet the UN accredited not-for-profit, along with partners here in Canada, is urging parents to educate children early on about the negative impact these hate-filled websites have.

"Harmful messages are being packaged in the most creative ways," said Avi Benlolo, President and CEO of FSWC. "There are a lot of people out there imbedding real hatred and calls for violence into what is misunderstood as 'popular culture.' Youth are especially vulnerable to the negative influence of racist online flash games, jokes with negative undertones and general hate-filled information that is accessible on blogs, web pages and common social networking sites."

Participating community organizations and public figures in the panel discussion included: Cathy Wing of the Media Awareness Network, Ashley McFarlane of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations and gay rights activist Martin Gladstone.

The panel discussed some of the findings from the report, which included:

- The negative effects that online content developed out of hate and terrorism can have on youth.
- The negative online communities that are created and how they can lead an individual 'lone wolf' to develop their ideas and act in hateful ways.
- How hateful online information is familiar to children but often parents and teachers are unaware of the content available to their children.

Quotes from panelists:

- "There are no librarians on the internet. Nobody is watching over the content online." Rabbi Cooper, Associate Dean, Simon Wiesenthal Center
- "The Media Awareness Network has found that in a study of almost 6000 children's favourite websites, these sites contained a lot of violence and hateful humour. Parents and educators are generally unaware of the popularity of these kinds of sites with young people." Cathy Wing, Co-Executive Chair, Media Awareness Network

- "Youth are growing up a lot quicker in the digital era; social networking comments sections are a hotbed for hate." Ashley McFarlane, communications professional, Urban Alliance on Race Relations.
- "Those that are in charge of these sites can set the rules. What shocks me is that sites abdicate their right to remove hateful content." Martin Gladstone, gay rights activist and lawyer

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center will continue to compile an annual record of online hate and provide it to police, intelligence services, educators, governments and community groups around the world in order to inform the public about its negative impact.

**About Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies**

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies is a Canadian human rights organization dedicated to fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action. The Center currently has over 25,000 members across Canada, and confronts important contemporary issues including racism, antisemitism, terrorism and genocide. Visit [www.fswc.ca](http://www.fswc.ca) for more information.

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