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## Battling online terror

By **Walter Joseph Lyng**, *The Suburban*

Canadians are limited in what they can put online which, according to the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (F.S.W.C.) for Holocaust studies, is not such a bad thing.

"The principle is that freedom of speech is not absolute in Canada ... and the limit is hate speech," said Richard Marceau, consultant to the F.S.W.C.

Last Thursday, the F.S.W.C. held a conference at the downtown Delta hotel to launch the 2006 edition of their *Digital Terrorism and Hate* CD-ROM and to honour Dr. Myrna Lashley, director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (C.R.R.F.), for her promotion of multi-cultural tolerance.

While the Internet has provided a forum for people around the world to share legitimate information, it has also become a place for people to spread disinformation, propaganda, extremism and hatred. This year's edition of *Digital Terrorism and Hate* is based on a study conducted by the F.S.W.C. that found approximately 6,000 websites the organization considers to be "problematic," with content that includes suicide bomber instructions, animated hate, terrorist recruitment and neo-Naziism.

"What we do is when we come across something, if it's a hate site we go straight to the [Internet] provider ... and usually within 24, 48 hours, some 95 percent of the time they call back and they say 'we looked at it, you're absolutely right, we've taken it off,'" said Leo Adler, director of national affairs for the F.S.W.C.

Such compliance on the part of Internet service providers is not necessarily the case everywhere. Many Internet offenders are based in countries like the U.S. where free speech is virtually unlimited. Blatant hate sites are less likely to originate from Canada.

"There's a criminal code section [in Canada] specifically dealing with hate speech and when this is [violated] the person is charged with hate speech."

According to Marceau and Adler, though, what qualifies as hate speech is a matter of opinion. They believe, for instance, that sites based out of Canada like Jihad Unspun should be shut down because of what they consider to be its hateful message. The site has been able to stay online, however, because it does not meet with the criteria of Canada's hate speech laws, as it claims to be a sight presenting an unbiased Islamic perspective.

When it comes to religion, though, Marceau said it can be difficult to distinguish between fundamentalism and extremism.

"To say, for example, 'I'm Christian, my religion is supreme, you have to believe in Jesus to be saved,' that is perfectly O.K., if you say 'my religion is the best one, is supreme [so] then I can kill the others that don't follow it or the ones who will not convert to my religion' — that's the line that's crossed," said Marceau.

Outside of religious extremism, some of the most prevalent hate on the web concerns itself with race and sexual orientation that focus on stereotypes, fear and ignorance to spread their message. Marceau described one online game where the player, in order to avoid being raped, tries to shoot and kill a naked gay man as he jumps out from behind a bush. The goal of another game is to have the black hero to commit the highest number of drive-by shootings.

According to the F.S.W.C., these games are especially harmful because of their appeal to children.

"You try to get more tolerance out there and there's always some idiot who will come and say 'Yeah, but ... ,' and if you get young minds ... it's so easy for nefarious people to get into that gap and say 'You know what, the reason your father hasn't got a job is because of the Jews and the reason your mom lost her job is because the nigger took it,'" said Lashley.

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**Marceau: Limits needed on freedom of speech.**