

**Remarks by the President of MAGEN LEAGUE
Rabbi&Dr. ALEXANDER LAKSHIN
as delivered at
The OSCE Meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and Anti-
Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes
Paris, June 16, 2004**

Dear Madam Falque-Pierrotin, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor and a privilege to address this important meeting on behalf of MAGEN League – the international Jewish counter-missionary and human rights organization.

As has been mentioned by several speakers, we find ourselves between a hard place and a rock – our general commitment to free speech and a need to stop or at least decrease hate propaganda in cyber-space.

Cyber-space is a model of the real world – but with less fear of repercussions and more freedom to act under assumed identity. In many cases such identities are assumed by some members of the Internet community in order to attract to their sites target audience that otherwise would be unwilling to go to those sites and get their message or to communicate with them. In some countries certain forms of such use of the Internet might be considered illegal and persecuted, for example pedophiles posing as children to attract kids.

In the presentation by Mr. Haraszti earlier at this session we have seen an example of how a search for the word “Jew” on one of the leading search-engines brings an anti-Semitic site at the top of the list. The site name does not contain any “warning signs”, and therefore people unwilling to be exposed to its content might visit it.

We find many sites with Jewish names and Jewish-style logos on the banners which in fact either carry anti-Semitic propaganda in most explicit terms, or plainly deliver virus to the computer of any person who logged on to the site, or are dedicated to converting Jews into other religions while doing it through deceptive tactics. The latter phenomenon is rarely perceived as anti-Semitic, since there are no “hate speech key words”. However, such abuse of trust and misrepresentation should be properly exposed and condemned by the free society as unfair. Domain names like “Jewish holidays” or “shalom” belong to missionary organizations trying to convert Jews to evangelical Christianity. The clear objective of the missionary groups that create and support such sites is to put an end to the existence of the Jewish people as a unique ethnic and religious community; therefore they should be considered anti-Semitic.

We at MAGEN League are most definitely dedicated to freedom of speech. However, freedom of choice and consumer protection should exist in the cyberspace as well. Any user of the Internet is entitled to protection from misrepresentation and false advertising. Abuse of terms and symbols of one’s creed or ethnic group to carry messages hostile to that very group or religion should be

considered a form of hate propaganda. It has nothing to do with legitimate dissemination of one's faith in the free society, since it widely employs deceptive tactics.

I would like to comment on Mr. Nosik's remark on a relatively small number of Russian – language hate sites. While that is true, forums in Russian-language Internet provide an abundance of hate speech. Virtually any news, regardless of the subject, generates a barrage of responses containing hate remarks against Moslems, Jews, Caucasians, Americans, Arabs, rich people – the list is incomplete. I have no explanation for this phenomenon, and suggest that a research should be undertaken to provide some clues as to who and why is using forums – the utmost form of the free speech on the Internet to spread hatred.

I also suggest creating, promoting and supporting a multi-lingual site that would provide brief information on the true nature of Internet sites that carry racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and other offensive forms of hate propaganda, so that any interested person would be able to refer to this “blacklist” and make an informed choice. In this way we can convey the position of the international community on the hate propaganda without limiting freedom of speech.

I would like to conclude with the following:

Cyberspace is a reflection of the world-at-large. If we put enough effort in education that promotes respect for differences, peaceful co-existence and tolerance, the Internet will also become hate-free.

Thank you.

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