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Session 4: Information and Awareness-Raising:
The Role of the Media in Conveying and Countering Prejudice

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my contribution, I shall devote myself primarily to some systematic considerations regarding the Internet as a new and little researched medium. In the area of hatred, calumny and violence as well as anti-pluralism and anti-Semitism, this form of information transfer is of particular significance. There is also a little to be said about newspapers and television.

I would like to put the following opinion to you: the language and imagery of hatred and violence in Internet hypertexts are not original at all, and anti-Semitism and anti-pluralism on the Internet have very little to offer in terms of new ideas and insights.

As far as *content* is concerned, cybertexts on the Internet are to a large extent borrowed from elsewhere. They are copies of imaginary ideas of "Jews" or "Auschwitz" or "Israel" and then copies of these copies. Virtual reality is merely a transformation of social reality. It is essential that we understand this. The violent fantasies, anti-Semitism, racism, sexism and obscenities that we find on the Internet do not exist in isolation, but are a reflection of the social mainstream and of the social groups and subgroups existing there.

On the other hand, the Internet also makes visible something that is developing out of fantasies and subconscious ideas as a contemporary social reality in radical youth movements, social clubs, groups of political enthusiasts, Christian and Muslim communities, intellectual milieus or new immigrant groups in Europe. It is astonishing that non-European groups borrow and make use of suitable anti-Semitic symbols and motifs from classic European sources of anti-Judaism and from Nazi illustrations. Anti-Semitism thus serves as a historically derived code for *anti-pluralism* in general. Anti-pluralism means that a particular religious, social or ethnic group spreads hatred and calumny aimed at another religious, social or ethnic group - irrespective of who is involved. Anti-Semitism is disseminated, not in spite of Auschwitz, but rather because of it, and this new form of anti-Semitism preaches a gospel which makes a point of spreading hatred in name of anti-racism and human rights. With this reversal of premises and realities, it is an anti-Semitism directed against Jews and against the existence of Israel.

Hypertexts on the Internet are thus imitations and images giving expression to the experience of social deviance within the majority society. Forums on the Internet open up space for this. Thus, taboo and illegal phraseology becomes visible and readable to a degree and with a lack of restraint that was never possible before. However, they existed long before and made use of the imagery of hatred and calumny in the course of centuries, as in the case of anti-Semitism. What is new here is that the Internet offers this reality dissemination protected by <u>anonymity</u>.

These insights into the Internet and cybertexts with regard to violence and hatred are based on the findings of a scientific research project entitled "Violence" conducted by Nico Rubeli at the University of Basel [www.unibas.ch/violence/].

What consequences are to be considered meanwhile in the political context? What does this mean for the problem of "anti-Semitism", and what does it suggest to you as delegates of your countries?

First, it is of no use at all to say that what is visible and readable in virtual reality should be regarded as "pathological." Such statements underestimate hatred and its fantasies as a social and political reality. What matters is clear: hatred and violence can be combated effectively only in the social reality.

Second, it means that no dialogue or willingness to enter into discussions can be developed on the Internet. Arguing against hatred in chat rooms or having electronic discussions with anti-Semites in forums would merely focus on the virtual reality and, more than anything else, legitimize the anonymous dissemination of hatred, violence, anti-pluralism and anti-Semitism.

In other words, the virtual reality must be translated back into the arena of political confrontation. Only in that way can the game with illusions be countered.

First of all, a point of principle: anonymity on the Internet, as the core of virtual reality, must be abolished. All who operate websites, participate in online chats, open forums or write texts for them must make their identity known. Users should be registerable and thus identifiable. Establishing this principle is a political task which has to be legitimized democratically. For this, instruments promoted or applied by the political decision-makers are needed.

The principle of non-anonymity called for here is not inconsistent with the principle of free speech because those who makes their identity known contribute to the protection of free speech. The Internet reality shows us this as if in a mirror. On the one hand, users today employ the logo "free speech" to disseminate hatred and violence anonymously, which is an abuse of democracy. On the other hand, concerned critics of this situation are already being dismissed as Internet "block caretakers," a term borrowed from National Socialism which refers to the perpetrators in concentration camps.

Second, an ethic of the Internet in a spirit of effective "corporate citizenship" is required internationally. There is a need for legislation and legal practice so that partially already existing rules can be given effect through sanctions. The providers have to guarantee that users who spread hatred can actually be prosecuted in accordance with the relevant national laws. I therefore draw attention to the additional and explanatory protocols to the

Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime, the Copenhagen agreements and, of course, the International Convention on the Elimina tion of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 4 January 1969. It should be considered to what degree an international convention is desirable here. It should be made clear to the governments of those States that tolerate anti-Semitism or even contribute to its dissemination that this will not be tolerated by the international community.

Third, a suggestion: it would be useful for the OSCE to promote existing initiatives which translate virtual reality back into political and social realities. I am currently aware of the initiative of the "International Network Against Cyber Hate" [www.inach.net], a group of "Internet street workers" from the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland and Poland. Here, an exchange of information is being built up on websites relevant for criminal law and on Internet providers. From Switzerland, the Basel initiatives [www.akdh.net] are, for instance, involved in this.

Lastly, I would like to say something about two traditional media, namely newspapers and television. What has been said about the Internet does not fully apply here, but nor can it be simply ignored. We have the impression that traditional media also often reproduce prejudices and fantasies instead of working on information in specific contexts with concrete stories. In these circumstances, what we read in the newspapers has far less to do with the description of reality than with the automatic recycling of something that has already been said.

The media are often not the solution to the problem, but part of the problem itself. From their safe desks, media producers run the risk of underestimating the ideologues of hatred or even aiding them and thus treating the victims of hatred as though they were responsible for their own misfortune.

Newspapers talk a great deal about Jews and about <u>anti-Semites</u>, but they rarely talk to Jews, nor do they seek out and expose those people who spread anti-Semitism, anti-pluralism or hatred, particularly in connection with the conflict in the Middle East. In Switzerland, the Confederal Commission against Racism has recommended that the media talk with the minorities living in the country. That presupposes, however, that they are able to understand, recognize and interpret their languages.

In the face of hatre d and violence, journalists should increasingly go into hitherto unknown areas, where hatred against other minorities has been disseminated for a long time, and look for the unknown originators. It would be a contribution towards exposing the tenacious anonymity of hatred and violence. This seems to me to be the best way of protecting future victims of this hatred and violence in the long term.