What is cyberhate?

Definition: Any use of electronic communications technology to spread anti-Semitic, racist, bigoted, extremist or terrorist messages or information

Background:

- While the Internet has transformed our lives in many positive ways, allowing people of all races, religions and nationalities to engage in meaningful conversations and bridge geographical gaps, it has also served as a vehicle for transmitting hate.
- **Electronic communications technology**: This term encompasses a variety of tools, including but not limited to websites, social networking platforms, dating sites, blogs, on-line games, instant messages, e-mail, and text messages.

Why is it difficult to combat?

Anonymous perpetrators:

- Internet users can spew hatred while hiding behind a virtual mask that not only enables bigots to vent their hatred anonymously, but also allows them to create new identities if one of theirs is shut down. This anonymity often results in a game of "whack-a-mole," making it exceedingly difficult to expose or shame anonymous haters.

Its incalculable size and reach:

- **Access –** the Internet is free and available on almost every electronic device. Thus anyone, including children, can access or encounter cyberhate.
- **Volume** – the sheer number of users and volume of online content makes it unrealistic to think that Internet providers could find and remove every manifestation of cyberhate.
- **Rumors** – the Internet has no filters or fact-checkers, thus making possible the exponential spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Impracticability of a legal solution:

- The international nature of the Internet makes a legal solution largely impractical
- Not only is hate speech hard to define, mostly because the line between hate speech and honest dissent is blurry, but any laws passed in an attempt to limit hateful content online would be virtually impossible to enforce.

What are the most effective responses to cyberhate?

Individuals must speak out:

- **Flag**: Internet providers usually rely upon their users to flag offensive content, thus it is vitally important for people to do so.

- **Speak and Applaud**: the best response to bad speech is good speech. While challenging extremists and terrorists online is not wise, those who engage in cyberbullying or propagate hate should be.
- **Know**: familiarize yourself with the community with which you are dealing – both the group posting the hate speech and the internet provider hosting the content. Most internet companies do not want to support hate speech – hold them accountable.

How does ADL respond to cyberhate?

Working with Internet providers:

- Most major Internet companies have provisions that empower them to remove offensive content from the sites they serve. ADL works with providers to impose these types of provisions in their user Terms of Service, if they haven't already, and to pursue even stricter enforcement of existing policies.
- **How Internet providers can become more effective at combatting cyberhate:**
    - ADL encourages these providers to establish industry standards, promote anti-hate messages, devote more resources to educating users, respond directly to complainants, work with the experts in hate and be more open to posting disclaimers.

Educating the public on prevalence of cyber hate:

- Since the 1990s, ADL has been monitoring cyberhate, reporting incidents to the public and proposing ways to effectively fight it. By establishing taskforces, creating toolkits, and supporting legislative action, ADL advocates peaceful and proactive resolutions, while still respecting everyone's right to free speech.

ADL Resources

The following are two key tools in ADL's strategy for responding to cyberhate. More information is available on the "Combating Hate" page on ADL's website.

ADL Cyberhate Safety Action Guide (available at www.adl.org/cybersafetyguide)

- This Guide brings together in one place the relevant terms of service and community guidelines that address how to respond to cyberhate on all of the major platforms.

Best Practices for Responding to Cyberhate (available at www.adl.org/cyberhatebestpractices)

- This document, produced by ADL and endorsed by the major companies, highlights the industry's commitment to address cyberhate and outlines how they respond.