

Dates: 9-10 November 2017

Country: UK and Europe



The 9th and 10th of November mark the [No Hate Speech Movement's Action Day](#) countering antisemitic hate speech. It is also on these date in 1938 when the *Kristallnacht* occurred in Germany; a pogrom targeting the Jewish community. These two days urge people to think about antisemitism today, a form of hate speech which is still very much present.

The internet acts as a two-edged sword when it comes to hate speech. On one hand, it offers those with hateful things to say an easy avenue to do so. The internet can keep someone anonymous and allows them to detach from what they are saying, giving people an outlet to say things which they might never say to someone in person. However, amongst these hateful incidents, the Internet also facilitates more ways to fight antisemitism. People are able to speak up about antisemitism via social media in a way that they could not before.

It is important to be aware of the number of antisemitic incidents that continue to occur. The [Community Security Trust](#), known as CST, is a charity which focuses on protecting British Jews from antisemitism. They recently released an [eye-opening report](#) documenting the antisemitic incidents that occurred within the first six months of 2017. CST recorded 767 antisemitic incidents in the UK in these first six months of 2017, which is a sharp increase from 2016, where there were 589 antisemitic incidents in the first six months of the year.

CST also reported on the number of antisemitic incidents that occur online, predominantly on social media. Mark Gardner, communications director for CST, talked to us about CST's findings regarding online antisemitism: "CST has recorded a steady increase in antisemitism online over the past two years. In 2014

[CST recorded 233](#)

antisemitic incidents on social media, in 2015

[CST](#)

[recorded 185](#)

incidents on social media and in 2016 CST recorded

[287 incidents on social media](#)

. However the percentage of antisemitic incidents online has remained at approx. 20% of the total recorded antisemitic incidents. This suggests that as antisemitic incidents 'in the real world' are increasing, so too are antisemitic incidents online. However, CST only logs antisemitic incidents online that are directly reported to us. CST does not trawl the internet for incidents, and therefore this figure is likely to only represent the tip of the iceberg of antisemitic incidents on social media."

Such statistics are concerning, as they show that the Internet is being used regularly to spread antisemitism. However, the Internet can also be a useful and successful tool in fighting antisemitism. Reporting online antisemitism is a successful way of fighting it. One positive aspect of antisemitism occurring online is that there is clear evidence; if someone tweets an antisemitic message, the victim can use this tweet as evidence. An example of this is Belgian politician [Laurent Louis](#), who used his Facebook and Twitter accounts to voice his antisemitic beliefs. Because Louis was a public figure, many people filed complaints against his antisemitic proclamations. Ultimately, Louis received a large fine and was sentenced to six months in prison, due to his continuing denial of the Holocaust. This case shows how the Internet offers accountability, and how the online community can use the Internet to help bring an end to online antisemitism.

Unfortunately, there does seem to be a gap in the law when it comes to online antisemitism.

Gardner explains: "Legally more needs to be done to combat online antisemitism. At the moment, when reporting incidents of illegal antisemitic hate speech online, the most relevant laws are the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and the Malicious Communications Act 1988. However, there are no specific laws to tackle *online*

hate speech specifically. Often it is difficult to determine what breaks the law, but often it is the volume of posts from a user which determines whether the law has been broken. This needs to be changed to make it easier to charge repeated antisemitic users."

On the other hand, there has been some positive change when it comes to the responsibility of social media platforms in tackling hate speech. These platforms have to get involved when it comes to hate speech, as most of it is happening on their domains. For a long time, the majority of IT companies did not respond to people's reports of hate speech. However, this seems to be changing. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all have more stringent policies in place for [reporting and dealing with hate speech](#). In 2016, the biggest IT companies operating in Europe signed a code of conduct drafted by the European Commission in cooperation with several NGOs. This code of conduct acts as a guide for social media platforms on how to deal with hate speech on their platforms, but many are still the challenges ahead when it comes to identification of hate speech and transparency.

CST has also had experience dealing with social media platforms when it comes to online antisemitism. Gardner explains how these services still need to improve: "Social media companies have shown some readiness to remove antisemitic and illegal hate speech from their platforms, although what is, and what is not, removed remains inconsistent across the platforms. CST has trusted flagger status for all three social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) and this has helped in raising awareness of what constitutes antisemitism. This has in turn aided the companies with educating their support teams who deal with incidents to understand what should be removed. However, it is unclear how many instances of antisemitic hate speech online are removed from normal users. CST often receives complaints from users who have been targeted by antisemitic hate speech online, and the content has not been removed. Only when CST stepped in to report and possibly escalate the content, did it get removed."

It is clear that there is still a lot of work to be done when it comes to fighting online antisemitism. However, we are seeing more and more cases of people coming together online to try and stop the spread of antisemitism. The Internet and its wide reach could be used for good, providing tools and support for fighting antisemitism.

The Media Diversity Institute is one of the partners of the No Hate Speech Movement contributing to the Action Day countering antisemitic hate speech.