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ACLU STATEMENT ON DEFENDING FREE SPEECH OF UNPOPULAR ORGANIZATIONS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK--In the United States Supreme Court over the past few years, the American Civil Liberties Union has taken the side of a fundamentalist Christian church, a Santerian church, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. In celebrated cases, the ACLU has stood up for everyone from Oliver North to the National Socialist Party. In spite of all that, the ACLU has never advocated Christianity, ritual animal sacrifice, trading arms for hostages or genocide. In representing NAMBLA today, our Massachusetts affiliate does not advocate sexual relationships between adults and children.

What the ACLU does advocate is robust freedom of speech for everyone. The lawsuit involved here, were it to succeed, would strike at the heart of freedom of speech. The case is based on a shocking murder. But the lawsuit says the crime is the responsibility not of those who committed the murder, but of someone who posted vile material on the Internet. The principle is as simple as it is central to true

freedom of speech: those who do wrong are responsible for what they do; those who speak about it are not.

It is easy to defend freedom of speech when the message is something many people find at least reasonable. But the defense of freedom of speech is most critical when the message is one most people find repulsive. That was true when the Nazis marched in Skokie. It remains true today.

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