



Press Release

Government Action to Prevent Child Sex Abuse Paves Way for Progress

Yesterday the Minister for Justice, Simon Power deposited the United Nations Optional Protocol against the sale of children, prostitution and child pornography. This ratifies the UN instrument that came into force in 2002.

Mr Power said New Zealand joins 157 other countries that have ratified the Optional Protocol.

The ratification of this Optional Protocol now requires the New Zealand Government to report on the measures taken to address the requirements within the protocol to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.

Alan Bell, Director of the child protection agency ECPAT Child ALERT applauds the action but also notes New Zealand will need to do more to fully meet the conditions of the newly ratified Optional Protocol. "We have been campaigning for a number of years for New Zealand to ratify this important instrument and we applaud the Minister for taking action" says Mr Bell. "New Zealand by comparison has a good record in providing legislation that enables our law enforcement agencies to take action against those who abuse children. However there is no room for complacency and one only needs to witness the constant reports of child sex abuse and the alarming growth in child pornography being viewed by New Zealanders to see that more needs to be done to protect our children."

Included in the preamble the Optional protocol states "..... efforts to raise public awareness are needed to reduce consumer demand for the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography..." Mr Bell states "Whilst many of the requirements within the Optional protocol are being met already this is an area that requires attention. There is plenty of room for improvement in the area of raising awareness and education of the 'public at large, including children. The consumer demand for all forms of child sex exploitation has got to be addressed as every act only serves to increase the number of children being abused".

In conjunction with The Body Shop ECPAT Child ALERT recently presented the Minister with a petition signed by over 74,000 New Zealanders calling for the ratification of this Optional Protocol and also to introduce educational material into the curriculum for senior students to become more aware of the risks associated with child sex exploitation in all its forms including the Internet.

Article 9 of the Protocol says "States Parties shall promote awareness in the public at large, including children, through information by all appropriate means, education and training, about the preventive measures and harmful effects of the offences referred to in the present Protocol. In fulfilling their obligations under this article, States Parties shall encourage the participation of the community and, in particular, children and child victims, in such information and education and training programmes, including at the international level. "

"We now look forward to seeing more progress in this area to further enhance the child protection measures taken by New Zealand" says Mr Bell. "This is an issue not just for the Government alone but for every responsible New Zealander to become aware and put a stop to child sex abuse so that children can grow and develop free from fear and exploitation."

ECPAT Child ALERT is a registered charitable trust working to prevent the sexual exploitation of children

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