

Filtering Child Sex Abuse Images Welcomed

The Government decision to filter illegal child sex abuse images has been welcomed by the child advocacy group Child Alert. "This is an important step forward in protecting our children from abusers" said ECPAT/Child Alert Director, Alan Bell. "The amount of child pornography coming into New Zealand has reached unacceptable levels and poses a continuing threat to our children."

The material being filtered is confined to extreme forms of child sex abuse which have passed through the censorship process and shown to be illegal. Under New Zealand laws persons who download, collect or distribute such images are breaking the law and can have a prison sentence of up to ten years.

Child Alert has worked with the Department of Internal Affairs for some years and has seen the thoroughness with which they approach their work. The Department has strict controls over what is deemed to be illegal and the criteria used for selection is under constant scrutiny and review by legal officers. Their work has been recognised by Interpol officers as among the most efficient and effective in the world.

Child Alert is introducing a hotline which will enable computer users to report any instances of child sex abuse which they accidentally discover. This material will be reviewed by the Government censorship division and if found to be illegal under New Zealand law will be filtered.

Child Alert is greatly concerned at the number of child sex abuse images coming into this country and will support any action to limit this flow. Forensic experts dealing with child sex abuse images both in New Zealand and overseas claim that the age of children being abused is getting younger and the forms of abuse more extreme. With several thousand sites in the world offering such images some action is required.

The demand for child sex abuse images is world-wide and every country is working to find ways to limit its effect. Child welfare groups know that behind every image on the screen there is an actual child, whose abuse and screams remain on the web for years to come. The damage done to children remains with them throughout their life and its effect should not be minimised.

The programme being introduced into New Zealand is based on a Swedish model which has proved successful in reducing the quantum of illegal material in that country.

In the first six months of this year there have been 26 persons convicted in New Zealand Courts for collecting and/or distributing child sex abuse images. Eleven of these offenders had crimes which were serious enough to be given a jail sentence by the judge. It is an illustration of the extent to which child sex abuse is becoming a way of life for some New Zealanders.

Child Alert welcomes this new development and hopes that it will get full support from Internet Service Providers and computer users.

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