

Launch of ECPAT Child Alert Hotline

A New National Service for Computer Users to Report Child Pornography

“There is an explosion of illegal child sexual abuse images on the Internet.” Says Alan Bell, Director of ECPAT Child ALERT. He says “The trend is that children being abused are younger and that the abusive acts are becoming more violent. Every sexual exploitation image is a real child, who has been abused, raped and degraded.”

ECPAT International is a global network of organisations and individuals in over 70 countries around the world working to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children. As a member of the ECPAT global network, Child ALERT focuses on key areas to ensure that children enjoy their fundamental rights, free from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation both in New Zealand and abroad.

Mr Bell says “ It is time New Zealanders were more aware of the amount of illegal child sex abuse images available on the Internet. Not only does it show images of real children being sexually abused – it also poses a risk for computer users who may access these sites.” On August 3 2009 Child ALERT will launch an Internet Hotline that enables computer users to report inappropriate websites containing illegal images of children being sexually exploited – and just at the click of a button.

The Child Alert Hotline has been developed over the last three years in conjunction with the Department of Internal Affairs. With an alarming increase in the number of clicks to inappropriate websites, the need for such a tool is paramount in protecting the innocence of our children. The Hotline will be introduced as another effective means of combating illegal child sexual abuse images (child pornography) on the Internet.

The Hotline provides a browser plug-in through a quick, safe download that features the ECPAT Child Alert icon. If a suspect website is viewed, the computer user simply clicks on the Child ALERT icon and the screen will disappear. The anonymity of the person reporting is protected. The software harvests the URL and ISP details and transmits this data in encrypted format to the ECPAT Child Alert Hotline Office. The data will then be filtered to remove hoax reports and the remaining sites will be referred automatically to the Department of Internal Affairs, who in turn will inspect the reported sites and take the appropriate action including the denying of access to any illegal child sexual abuse sites.

The launch of the Hotline will take place in conjunction with The Body Shop who will implement a joint national campaign on the issue. Disks containing the software will be offered at no cost to the public through The Body Shop stores or the browser plug-in can be downloaded through the Child ALERT website www.childalert.org.nz.

Mr Bell concludes “This not a question of impinging on human rights or restricting access to the Internet. It is about limiting the amount of illegal child sex abuse images (commonly called child pornography) that can be accessed. We need to take action to prevent children being sexually abused and to prevent these illegal sites being viewed by children and families. There is no defence for allowing these illegal images to be available – they amount to evidence of crime scenes.”

For more information on ECPAT and the Child ALERT Hotline please contact Alan Bell on (E) alan.bell@ecpat.org.nz or (P) 09 376 5252.