PRESS RELEASE

BANGKOK, 11 November 2005 – Weak laws and fragmented industry action is exposing children around the world to increasingly serious violence through the Internet and other cyber technologies, according to a new report released today.

The report, Violence Against Children in Cyberspace, says violence against children through new technologies is pervasive, causes deep and lasting physical and psychological damage to the child victims, and is outstripping the resources of law enforcement agencies.

Violence Against Children in Cyberspace was written by ECPAT International with leading experts around the world as a contribution to the UN Study on Violence Against Children. The report draws together the latest knowledge on cyber violence against children and outlines an agenda for action, including greater industry action and stronger national legislations harmonised to international standards.

Forms of cyber violence against children outlined in the report include: child pornography and 'live' online sexual abuse for paying customers, online sexual solicitation, cyber stalking and bullying, and access to illegal and harmful materials. As well, child exploiters use cyberspace to network for child sex tourism and trafficking.

The UN Study leader, Prof Paulo Pinheiro has welcomed the report as a comprehensive and "groundbreaking" overview of violence against children related to new technologies and sounding a clear warning of the urgent need for action to combat it.

"This report gives the global community no excuse for saying that 'we didn't know' or 'we couldn't foresee' the exponentially increasing violence caused to children in relation to new information and communication technologies," says Prof. Pinheiro.

ECPAT International executive director Carmen Madrinan says the ECPAT report is a response to growing concerns about "the ease with which people who are intent on harming children move between the physical and virtual worlds in order to exploit a child".

Ms Madrinan says the scale and changing forms of cyber violence against children are outstripping the existing capacities of legislation and law enforcement agencies, and of society's understanding of how the technologies work.

The report identifies the explosion in the making, distribution and possession of child pornography as the "most abhorrent" manifestation of violence against children in cyberspace, says Ms Madrinan. That, in turn, is fuelling greater demand for sexual exploitation of children.

The report estimates the child pornography industry to be worth billions of dollars a year, although most child sex abuse images are traded for non-monetary gain. The main free-to-view

sites have been traced to the Commonwealth of Independent States, the USA, Spain, Thailand, Japan and the Republic of Korea. More than half of the child sex abuse images which are sold for profit are generated from the United States and nearly a quarter from Russia. These countries are also the main hosts of commercial child pornography websites, followed by Spain and Sweden. Millions of child sex abuse images circulate online, and through mobile phones and peer networks. Interpol's shared child pornography database contains images of between 10,000 and 20,000 individual child victims, of whom fewer than 350 have ever been located.

New and emerging trends in violence against children in cyberspace, include:
- Web cameras used to transmit 'live' sexual abuse of children for paying customers in different countries
- The spread of teen websites where young people post personal details and intimate photos often without realising they are available to a global audience. These teen websites may be linked to adult dating sites
- Online multiplayer games as avenues for child exploiters to target and 'groom' children and young people for later sexual abuse
- Some cases of children and young people as traders in child pornography.

The report notes that although most attention has been on chat rooms as a forum for sexual predators to target and 'groom' children and young people for later abuse, children are now switching to instant messaging and peer networking technologies which are even harder to monitor. These file sharing technologies are also becoming a major tool for traders in child sex abuse images.

Ms Madrinan says the report sounds a loud warning to developing countries that even children who do not have access to personal computers or the Internet are at risk of being sexually exploited through new technologies.

The rapid spread through Asia and Africa of mobile phones with high speed Internet and large file capacity will give children easy access to harmful materials - and access to them by sexual predators. Child exploiters use mobile phones to record their abuse of children for uploading to the Internet or peer networks, and to arrange child sex tourism and trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

"Despite the fact that many countries think that it's not a problem, it is a huge problem in terms of combating violence against children and the violence that is coming down the pike against children," says Ms Madrinan.

Ms Madrinan says the report shows the need for urgent, wide-ranging actions by governments, the industry and all sectors of the community to combat the rise in violence against children in cyberspace.

The key elements of the report's Agenda for Action are:

- Stronger legislation and law enforcement

Governments are urged to implement National Plans of Action to protect children from cyber violence and to enact comprehensive laws which harmonise with international legislation. The report recommends legislation to require Internet Service Providers to monitor for online child pornography, and to remove or prevent access to illegal material of which they have knowledge.

Law enforcement agencies should review their practices to identifying and locating victims of child sex abuse images their top priority, as well as catching the perpetrators. Standard protocols for investigating child sexual abuse should include automatic checks for photographing or recording of the abuse. Welfare agencies need to develop guidelines and protocols for care and rehabilitation of child victims of cyber violence.

- Greater responsibility from the IT industry

The report calls for an international IT industry working group to develop and implement worldwide industry standards for child protection. The industry should also work with governments to develop and implement regulatory frameworks to protect children.

Individual IT companies are called on to implement codes of conduct to protect children and to provide safety information and pre-installed safety software with every purchase of a PC or mobile phone.

- Comprehensive education campaigns

There is a need for major awareness-raising campaigns to address the rising demand for sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. Education on child protection is needed for children, parents, educators and Internet operators.

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