

Combating Child Pornography

An international conference 'Combating Child Pornography On The Internet', was held in Vienna, Austria, from 29 September to 1 October 1999. The conference was a result of the transatlantic dialogue between the European Union and the United States and was based on an initiative by the Foreign Ministers of Austria and the US, Wolfgang Schüssel and Madeleine Albright. As the large majority of Internet users and the main Internet Service Providers are based in the US and Europe, there is a strong belief they should join efforts to combat child pornography.

The conference was co-sponsored by the US and Austria, and organised with the support of the European Union. High-level officials from government, the judiciary and the police, as well as representatives of international and regional organisations, the Internet industry, non-governmental organisations and experts were invited.

The objectives of the conference were to:

- re-inforce cooperation among law-enforcement officials and the judiciary;
- establish voluntary self-regulatory mechanisms (codes of conduct) among Internet service providers; and,
- encourage the establishment of further hotlines (hotlines enable citizens to report leads on child pornography found on the Internet) and of networking among existing hotlines.

The wider objectives of the conference were to raise awareness and mobilise public opinion regarding child pornography on the Internet and to encourage cooperation, especially among law-enforcement officials and the industry. Speakers emphasised that there were many positives to the Internet, but there is content there such as child pornography, and no matter how much or little is there, it is a problem that needs to be addressed.

There have been a number of meetings and conferences around the world addressing the issue of child pornography on the Internet. The first major conference was the 'World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children' in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1996. At this conference a Declaration and Agenda for Action were unanimously adopted and strategic alliances formed to fight against those who sell and buy children for sex.

UNESCO has also taken an interest in these issues, holding an expert meeting they called 'Sexual Abuse of Children, Child Pornography and Paedophilia on the Internet: An international challenge' in January this year. At this meeting an Action Plan was developed, addressed primarily to UNESCO, that contained elements which must be taken up by all actors in the fight against paedophilia on the Internet. UNESCO's role in this joint effort should be primarily that of a catalyst.

The conference commenced with addresses by Wolfgang Schüssel and a video address by Al Gore, among others, and outlined the positive aspects of the Internet, but that there were several dangers, in particular, child pornography. In his video address, Al Gore addressed the ways in which child pornography on the Internet can be tackled, emphasising the 'digital toolbox' and cooperation between the European Union and the United States as being vitally important, even mentioning the importance of Australia in the recent child pornography 'stings'.

Child pornography, at its worst, was described as a picture of a serious sexual assault, and therefore a picture of a scene of a crime. To com-

bat this crime, international cooperation and a coordinated approach is needed. However it is necessary when considering child pornography to identify the problem, and to not confuse the issues of content that is unsuitable for children that is legal, and the content that is illegal such as child pornography. To deal with this problem, as with the issue of content that is unsuitable for children, we need a scalable response. A response that takes into account that only two per cent of the world's population is now online, and that both the number of people online and the content available online are both growing exponentially.

The conference focussed on the following issues within the working groups with the aim of developing recommendations:

- how to re-enforce cooperation among law-enforcement officials and the judiciary;
- the question of elaborating elements for codes of conduct of the Internet industry; and,
- how to make hotlines more effective, encourage networking and the establishment of further hotlines.

The major conclusions the conference reached as a result of these working groups were:

- Zero tolerance against child pornography on the Internet;
- The need for a global partnership among all actors and stakeholders;
- Worldwide criminalisation of child pornography;
- Strengthening law enforcement at national level and improving international cooperation among law enforcement agencies;
- Closer cooperation and partnership between governments and the Internet industry;
- The critical role of Hotlines or Tiplines; Training and capacity building; and,
- Raising awareness and empowerment of users.

Details on the conference and other material may be found at <http://www.stop-childpornog.at>

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