

**Speech by Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D.,  
Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform  
at the launch of the  
5th Report of the ISPAI [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie) Service  
1st January to 31st December 2007  
22 July 2008  
Buswells Hotel**

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

I am very pleased to be invited by Mr. Paul Durrant, the General Manager of the Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland's Hotline to launch the 5<sup>th</sup> Report of the ISPAI [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie) Service.

Hotline.ie provides a secure and confidential service for the public to anonymously report content they encounter on the Internet that they suspect may be illegal.

Once reported, the material is assessed by Hotline Staff and, if considered to be probably illegal, steps are taken to instigate its removal from the internet.

Hotline.ie focuses primarily on the appalling crime of child abuse images - "child pornography".

Internet users should be aware however that it also deals with a wide range of other illegal content to be found on the internet including:

- financial scams,
- "phishing",
- incitement to violence,
- and the promotion of racial hatred.

Where content is deemed to be illegal Hotline will trace the source and jurisdiction of the material. A detailed report is then prepared and forwarded to the appropriate legal body in the relevant jurisdiction so that action can be taken.

Today I want to publicly call on any citizens who finds any trace of suspect activities be it when browsing web pages, or on "file sharing", web forums, chat rooms newsgroups or whatever, to report it to Hotline.ie immediately.

No one can turn a blind eye to this abuse.

The report is clear that the child pornography material reported to the Hotline is of an increasingly severe and appalling nature.

Against that background I want to publicly thank the work of the Content Analysts who deal with this material on all our behalves.

I am pleased to note that, for the eighth year running, Ireland has again maintained its clean record with no child pornography being found as originating from or being hosted in Ireland on ISPAI members facilities.

In this regard, I would like to commend those Irish internet service providers, who are members of ISPAI, and have undertaken, under a Code of Practice and Ethics agreed with the former Internet Advisory Board, to respond immediately to requests from the Hotline for action in the event that any illicit material is found on Irish servers.

The co-operation of the internet service providers is an essential part of the concept of an effective Hotline.

I congratulate ISPAI members for their responsible approach to playing their part in addressing internet safety, as evidenced by their practical and financial support for the work of the Hotline. Adherence to that Code of Practice and Ethics and support for the Hotline by the members of the ISPAI has been good for the industry and good for all those who access this exciting technology.

It is not an accident that we have had no reported incident of a child pornographic site being either hosted or distributed on the internet from Irish ISP facilities.

I would however, like to take this opportunity today to express my concern that, regrettably not all companies currently operating in this environment are members of the ISPAI and therefore not all industry members subscribe to the code of practice and ethics, or financially support the Hotline.

My message to them is clear and straightforward – join. Any responsible ISP or hosting company should contribute to the financing of the Hotline and join in the development and running of awareness programmes.

It is not good enough that some in this industry are happy to reap the benefits for themselves of self-regulation by riding on the backs of the ISPAI members who are making a concerted effort to make the internet safer for all.

It is essential that the industry that supplies the internet service, while promoting all its positive uses and benefits, continues to contribute in a meaningful and proactive way.

I want to emphasise to the industry that while I am willing to continue with the self-regulation model, I will not hesitate, should it become necessary, to introduce a statutory compliance model in the interests of the safety of our children and other vulnerable users of the internet.

The Office for Internet Safety in my Department will continue to monitor and oversee the self-regulatory framework, with a strong emphasis on working with all interested stakeholders in ensuring that all players in the internet service provider industry sign up to the code of practice and support the work of the Hotline.

As many of you will know, the recently established Office for Internet Safety (OIS) has overall responsibility for internet safety, particularly in relation to combating child pornography.

The OIS will expand on the work that was carried out by the former Internet Advisory Board (IAB). The IAB played a significant and pioneering role in raising awareness

about the risks associated with the use of the Internet, both within the internet providers sector and among the general public. In this regard, the OIS will be advised by an Internet Safety Advisory Council, which will be the successor to the Internet Advisory Board. The Advisory Council will be drawn from representatives of the key stakeholders in the statutory, industry and community sectors, and will support the work of the OIS. I expect to establish the new Council later this year.

Ireland is fortunate to have a vibrant ICT (Information and Communications Technology) sector. I want to congratulate members of the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI), who have enthusiastically cooperated with the measures already in place to protect children and other vulnerable sections of our community. The existing model of self-regulation concerning harmful or illegal content on the internet has stood us in good stead. It is a model which has found favour across the EU, based on an industry voluntary code of practice and ethics.

It is essential that the public continues to report illegal content Hotline having regard the slight drop in reporting noted in today's report. The Hotline has and will continue to run visibility events to promote this message, and it also has modified the online reporting component of the website to simplify the reporting task for the public.

I would strongly encourage any of you here whose organisations have public services on the Internet or are involved in any way with Child Safety, to consider adding the Hotline logo and brief explanation of its role and function to your web-site. The means to do this is provided on the Hotline web-site.

All of us who are concerned with protecting our society, and particularly our children and young people from illegal and harmful use of the Internet, from teachers, to legislators, and above all parents, must be ever vigilant and ready to take necessary action. I am confident that the Hotline, the Office for Internet Safety, the Garda Síochána and other agencies are fully committed to this vital task.

I commend the Hotline for their work, and congratulate them on their results to date. My congratulations to Paul Durrant on the production of a very comprehensive and informative report and I wish him and the staff of the Hotline continued success in this most important work.