



www.hotline.ie Launches First Annual Report 5th February 2002

Speech by Mr. Cormac Callanan, Hotline Director

Good morning Ladies and Gentleman.

The speakers before me have outlined the process by which the www.hotline.ie service was launched. The commitment of Internet industry to self-regulation, the enacting of the Child Pornography and Trafficking Act in 1998, and the completion of the first report of the Working group on the Illegal and Harmful Use on the Internet in July 1998 set the scene for the creation of the Child Pornography Internet Hotline. After a great deal of planning the www.hotline.ie service was launched in November 1999 with operational funding provided by the ISPAI and the EU Safer Internet Action Plan. The Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform also provided some financial support during the launch.

The www.hotline.ie service recognises the problem of child pornography and the complexity of responding to such activities as they relate to the Internet. The objective is to quickly and efficiently remove such material on the Internet in Ireland, to enable a swift investigation by An Garda Síochána and to collaborate at an international level with other hotlines.

The hotline has a strong mandate from the Internet Service Providers and from the Internet Advisory Board which provides day-to-day supervision and expertise to the hotline. This broad support has been essential to the success

achieved so far. Among many, I am directly grateful for the advice and encouragement of Mr. John Haskins, Deputy Chair of the Internet Advisory Board. There have been many lessons learned during the last two years which were extremely demanding on the hotline. These lessons relate to the issues surrounding the specific material being handled.

The Child Pornography and Trafficking Act 1998 makes it illegal for anyone to knowingly possess, distribute, produce, print, publish, import, export, sell or show any child pornography. A “child” means a person under the age of 17 years and “child pornography” means any visual representation that shows or, in the case of a document, relates to a person who is, or is depicted as being, a child and who is engaged in, or is depicted as being engaged in, explicit sexual activity. Against this precise and concise definition, the hotline was established. The mandate of the hotline in the beginning was agreed by all parties to deal exclusively with the issue of child pornography and trafficking. The objective was to gain knowledge and experience without the pressure to respond to other type of illegal activity such as racist material or extreme adult pornography.

It is perhaps obvious to those of you with a legal background but the clear definitions included in the 1998 act were sometimes difficult to apply in daily practice. The hotline started receiving reports immediately after launch in 1999 and during the period covered by this first report a wide range of issues were reported to the hotline for processing. These issues ranged from the expected reports of child pornography, to include such issues as adult pornography, unsolicited adult emails, virus attacks, financial scams and enquiries about filtering software solutions. There have been many requests for advice about best practices in dealing with non-illegal, yet harmful

material on the internet for the younger internet surfers. The differences between what is illegal and what is harmful is at the forefront of every assessment performed by the hotline.

In addition, the protocols between An Garda Siochana, the Internet Service Providers, The Data Protection Commissioner and the hotline needed to be developed and further enhanced as experience grew. I have worked very closely with all parties during the development of the ISPAI Code of Practice which confirms the relationships of the Internet Service Providers to the hotline and the role of the hotline in dealing with illegal and harmful content. The Internet Advisory Board has been active in promoting these protocols.

In November 1999, the Association of Internet Hotline Providers In Europe (INHOPE) was founded in Europe by 8 European hotlines fighting against child pornography on the Internet. These hotlines were based in Germany, France, Ireland, Netherlands and UK and there were three other international hotlines based in Norway, United States and Australia. The hotlines meet regularly and exchange knowledge, expertise and intelligence about illegal trends on the internet. Since November 1999 the association has since grown from 8 members to 16 members with an additional four hotlines considering joining the work of the association.

I mention this organization because I am currently the elected President of INHOPE since May 2001. The work of the Irish hotline would be greatly weakened if it operated alone and isolated from the wider world. The knowledge and training I have received from the INHOPE association has been invaluable and essential to the success of the Irish hotline. Issues such as tracing material on the Internet, exchange of reports about material located in other jurisdictions, new techniques used by criminals for the exchange of

illegal material on the Internet have helped the hotline perform its core activities since the beginning.

In the first report published today, I have been candid about the range of issues handled by the hotline since it was established. The statistics indicate a significant volume of reports received by the hotline. In January – December 2000 there were 378 reports received by the hotline service. In comparison, the Australian hotline, also started in November 1999 and operated by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, received 491 reports and UK Internet Watch Foundation established in late 1996 received 8,039 reports. There is no one-to-one relationship between reports received by the hotline and actions taken. Some reports can be duplicates of others, some can require multiple actions (reporting to ISP, reporting to An Garda Siochana, response to reporter, tracing content), etc.

From this volume of reports a very small number related to material located or hosted in Ireland. Much of the illegal material detected was located overseas with the majority of such reports forwarded to the US Cybertipline for further investigation. Only two reports were sent to An Garda Siochana during this period.

Experience has now confirmed that tracing and tracking child pornography following a report can be time-consuming and difficult. There are major issues about retaining material including child pornography for law enforcement purposes since there are no exemptions under Irish law for the work of the hotline service. This issue means that timely investigation is required from all parties to ensure a rapid response to the spread of Child Pornography on the Internet.

Of course, the work of the hotline is but one of a range of responses to illegal activity on the Internet. Other responses recognized by the EU Safer Internet Action Plan include Rating and Filtering technologies and awareness programmes.

It is clear from the reports received by the hotline that the Irish public are pleased with its existence and the opportunity it provides for Internet users to respond to illegal material on the Internet. The work of the hotline will continue.

Thank you.

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