

**Speech by John Laffan,
Executive Director of the Office for Internet Safety
at the launch of the
ISPAI Hotline redeveloped Website
Buswells Hotel
2 April 2008**

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

Firstly, I have been asked by Minister Lenihan to convey his sincerest apologies that he is unable to attend today. Notwithstanding that, in my capacity as Executive Director of the new Office for Internet Safety in the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, I am very pleased to launch the Hotline's redeveloped website, www.hotline.ie. The revamped website will ensure a high level of visibility for this very important service. This will therefore play an important part in the industry's response to cybercrime both in Ireland and across the world.

The Hotline is funded by the Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland (ISPAI), with support from the EU Safer Internet Programme, and was established in 1999 to attempt to combat the presence of illegal material on the internet. Whilst the Hotline focuses particularly on the appalling crime of child pornography it also deals with a wide range of illegal content on the internet including financial scams, "phishing", incitement to violence, and the promotion of racial hatred.

The Hotline receives reports of suspected illegal content encountered in Ireland from the public, and assesses the suspect material. Where content is deemed to be illegal, the Hotline will prepare a detailed report which is then forwarded to the appropriate legal body so that action can be taken.

There has of course been an enormous increase in internet usage in Ireland and the public are increasingly using the Hotline. In addition to other illegal material, the amount of child abuse images being reported has grown significantly and child pornography remains the top reason for report submissions. The increased number of reports made to the Hotline reflects, not only the increasing internet usage but also an increased willingness on the part of the public to take action in reporting it.

Much of the child pornography material reported to the Hotline is truly appalling. Responsible states and citizens must do everything in their power to try to curtail the trade in these images that occurs on the Internet. Anyone finding any trace of suspect activities be it when browsing web pages, or on "file sharing", web forums, chat rooms newsgroups or whatever, should report it to the Hotline so it can be followed up.

Now in its ninth year of operation, I am pleased to note that no report from the public in Ireland or from the 29 other Hotlines operated world wide, found that

child pornography originated on ISPAI members facilities here. That fact should be a source of pride to all ISPAI members.

The Minister has asked me to commend the Irish internet service providers who have undertaken, under a Code of Practice and Ethics agreed with the Internet Advisory Board, to respond immediately to requests from the Hotline for action in the event that any illicit material found on Irish servers.

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. However, not all companies operating in this environment are members of the ISPAI and not all industry members subscribe to the code of practice and ethics, or financially support the Hotline. This is not, in the long run, in the best interest of the industry or of the users of the technologies. Any responsible ISP or hosting company must 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 leave it to others to ensure that the internet is a safer place for all.

The Minister has indicated that he wants all the industry to be active contributors in support of the industry code of practice and the Hotline. In this regard the Minister has clearly indicated that, while he is willing to continue with the self-regulation model, he 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 Government plays its part through support for the relevant agencies and through a programme of strong legislation. In terms of legislation, in the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998, Ireland has one of the most robust pieces of legislation anywhere. Under the Act, the possession, distribution, importation and exportation or sale of all forms of child pornography - films, video or material in written or auditory form including material produced or transmitted via the internet - are offences with penalties of up to 14 years' imprisonment. Mere possession of child pornography can be punishable by imprisonment for up to 5 years.

An Garda Síochána fully investigates verified reports of suspect activity and monitor child pornography on the internet. Where evidence is available action is taken in accordance with legislation. I understand that An Garda Síochána, in conjunction with its EU colleagues, is currently examining new methods of preventing the production and distribution of child pornography on the internet.

Indeed, the Government has established the Office for Internet Safety as an executive office of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The OIS, opened its office at the beginning of March and has responsibility for internet safety, particularly in relation to child pornography.

In setting up the new Office, the Minister felt the time had come to step up our response to meeting the challenge posed by the Internet and the convergence

of technologies through the establishment of an office dedicated to a safer internet located within the Department of Justice. The establishment of a dedicated Office for Internet Safety (OIS) is an important step in the process of building the best possible protection for the community at large and in particular for children from the downside of the internet.

In addition, to placing cybercrime issues squarely within the crime policy framework of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the OIS will be in a position to encourage greater cohesion across state agencies. It will also be able to develop closer relationships with the Gardaí on the practicalities for the possible application of blocking technologies particularly with regard to child pornography.

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. Formal proposals for the establishment of the Advisory Council will be submitted to the Minister by the OIS in due course and it is expected that the new Council will be established 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 Internet Advisory Board together with the ISPAI has developed a model of self-regulation concerning harmful or illegal content on the internet which 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.

We need to get the message out, so any of you here whose organisations have public services on the Internet or are involved in any way with Child Safety, please consider adding the Hotline logo and brief explanation to your web-site. The method for doing so is set out on the Hotline website.

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. The Hotline, the Office for Internet Safety, the Garda Síochána and other agencies are fully committed to this vital task. I also look forward to ongoing cooperation between the Office for Internet Safety and the Industry in working to ensure that the Internet is a safer place for our children and young people.

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 new redeveloped website and I wish him and the Hotline continued success in this most important work.