

## **Speech by Brian Lenihan T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, at the launch of the ISPAI Child Pornography Hotline Third Report**

**Monday 27th February 2006**

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

I am very pleased to have been asked by Mr. Paul Durrant, the General Manager of the Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland's Hotline, to launch its third report here today.

I have followed the work of the Hotline very closely, and I see the service that it provides as a crucial part of our battle against illegal content on the internet in general, and against the evil that is child pornography in particular.

The Hotline is the key public face of ISP self-regulation which has been operating successfully in Ireland since 1999. The Government supports this industry initiative and was closely involved in the agreements that led to its establishment. The Internet Advisory Board is the Government's arm that oversees ISP self-regulation and that the Hotline operates at a high standard in accordance with agreed procedures. This is important so that the Gardaí and public can have confidence to work with the ISPAI Hotline.

As well as its role in monitoring and supporting self-regulation by the internet service provider industry, the Internet Advisory Board has a major role in the promotion of awareness of Internet downside issues. Its hard-hitting awareness campaigns are aimed at parents in particular, to help them to keep their children safe while online, especially in the home. It follows that parents should have a mechanism for reporting any illegal material that they or their children come across while online, and the Hotline fulfils that role.

I am very glad to see that 21 ISPs have now voluntarily joined the ISPAI and are backing this important initiative to make the Internet safer for children. While many of these ISPs are household names and provide a large proportion of the current Internet service in the country, there are many new entrants to the market. Some of these wireless and broadband new entrants, which you can see listed on the fact sheet, have decided to participate. And this is to be applauded.

However, I would like to see the situation where all access and hosting ISPs in the country would contribute to supporting the Hotline.

This is too important an issue to be used by the ISP avoiding their duty of financially supporting the Hotline service, to gain slight competitive advantage or marginally better profitability. The Hotline service is vital to keeping the Internet as safe as possible for its users - especially child users. In this connection I would like to thank Microsoft Ireland for the support of the Irish Hotline throughout the period which included a donation of software.

Since the Hotline was established in 1999, there has of course been an enormous increase in Internet usage in Ireland. In the report, you can see that the public are increasingly using the Hotline. The amount of serious child abuse images being reported has also grown year on year. Remember, that every such illegal image circulating on the Internet required a innocent child to be abused by a predatory adult - be it for sheer profit or to satisfy perverse desires.

Many of the images found by the Hotline are truly horrendous. Children as young as 5 or 6 (in some cases even babies and toddlers) have been photographed or videoed being raped and forced into all kinds of sexual acts. Responsible states and citizens must do everything in their power to try to curtail the trade in these images and contacts to support this trade that occur on the Internet.

It is through tracing these images that clues can be provided to police and welfare service to rescue these unfortunate children (irrespective of the country in which they happen to live) and bring these evil people who are doing this to justice. The Hotline plays an important part by accepting reports, providing the resources to validate them and channel those that are illegal directly to the appropriate jurisdiction and authority.

That is why this government, through the European Commission Safer Internet Programme, fully supports EC part-funding INHOPE and that the Irish Hotline is part of this organisation. INHOPE provides an International network of Government and police recognised Hotlines, that can very rapidly exchange information gained from reports between countries, and provide quality information to their local police who initiate criminal investigations to bring the perpetrators to justice.

This is an international fight to protect children. By constantly attacking this illegal advertising and child abuse content on the Internet, we hope to create real barriers for criminals, who may not be directly paedophiles, but who are willing to exploit children to supply images to paedophiles, purely to make money. Their activities are funding child abuse to provide the perverse images they sell for profit and real children are being damaged.

Paedophile rings also use the Internet, they also try to lure children into meeting so they can satisfy their socially unacceptable desires. These people are becoming more sophisticated and use the Internet extensively. Anyone finding any trace of such activities be it on "file sharing", web forums, chat rooms, newsgroups or whatever, should report it to the Hotline so it can be toll owed - up.

Reports can be made anonymously to the Internet and the details of those making the reports if provided are kept in confidence. The Hotline only forwards information about the target Internet content of the report - not those making the report.

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 means to do this are provided on the Hotline web-site.

Those who misuse the Internet are highly sophisticated and technically astute, and we must continually and pro-actively examine the effectiveness of our defences. I am confident that the Internet service provider industry, the Internet Advisory Board, the Garda Síochána and other agencies are fully committed to this vital task.

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 provides a first port of call for parents and members of the public in general who encounter illegal material on the internet. The increase in the number of reports made to the Hotline, covered by this report reflects, I believe, not only the increased level of Internet usage I spoke about earlier, and increased intrusion of illicit material, but also an increased willingness on the part of the general public to take action in reporting it.

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 Hotline continued success in this most important work.

In this regard, I would like 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.

The co-operation of the Internet service providers is an essential part of the concept of an effective Hotline. I congratulate them 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, as well as their contribution to the work of the Internet Advisory Board itself.

The full report can be accessed at [www.hotline.ie/thirdreport](http://www.hotline.ie/thirdreport)