

PRESS RELEASE



Children's Organisations across the World Call for Action on Internet Safety

London/Bangkok – April 18, 2005 – Today children's organizations in 67 countries are uniting to call on the world's leading Internet and high tech companies to take responsibility for ensuring children's safety online.

The call comes at the launch of the worldwide make-IT-safe campaign led by ECPAT International, a global child-rights NGO based in Bangkok, Thailand, and the UK-based Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS).

The make-IT-safe campaign will lobby IT leaders to create a global child protection body to set and implement worldwide industry standards, research safety technologies, and fund a global educational campaign.

The campaign will also urge governments to adopt IT child protection policies to ensure industry responsibility, to enable international legal co-operation against online child abuse, and to provide care and protection for children abused or exposed to harmful images and messages online.

CHIS spokesman and UK Internet safety expert John Carr says the IT industry must do much more to protect children and young people using its technologies.

"Children are constant and large scale users of the Internet yet daily, across the world, they are being exposed to harmful or damaging materials online and we continue to read of tragic instances of children being abused by sexual predators where the Internet played a key part in facilitating the initial contact that led to the abuse.

"When dealing with issues such as spam, viruses, phishing and other threats, the internet and online industries have shown a great willingness and a great ability to come together to develop common technical standards and protocols, and to agree common, effective means of promoting them. This has simply not happened in the field of child protection. This must change. And soon."

ECPAT International executive director Carmen Madriñán says it's time for the IT industry to acknowledge that it shares the same responsibility for protecting children as all other members of the global community.

“Parents, teachers, children’s groups and governments all have their part to play. But only the IT industry can deliver the technological and financial resources to ensure the safety of children and young people online and in interactive technologies.”

Ms Madriñán says some IT companies are concerned to ensure their technologies are safe for children, but it’s not nearly enough. The proof is seen daily in the courts, the news and in thousands of harmed children.

“Of the millions of images of child abuse that Interpol reports to be circulating online, for example, so far only 297 of the children abused to make these images have actually been located.

“Now it’s time for concerned IT companies to take the lead and ensure effective, global standards to make IT safe for all children and young people.”

ECPAT International's Asia youth representative Sangeet Shirodkar is calling on young people to take up the make-IT-safe campaign.

“Young people and children in need or in distress often look to the Internet to find affection and support from unknown people. A number of children are getting attracted to these chat rooms and later land up being exploited. IT industries must do much more to make the chat rooms safe and to block the transmission of illegal photos, videos and messages.”

Mr Shirodkar says the IT industry should also take responsibility for educating young people about the dangers of chat rooms and of circulating personal details and photos via cell phones.

The make-IT-safe campaign is supported by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. It is also backed by the Subgroup against Sexual Exploitation of Children of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The make-IT-safe campaign is running a global online petition and lobbying IT leaders and governments around the world. Industry and government responses will be monitored and publicized on the campaign website.

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ECPAT International global launch press conference: **10am-11am, Monday April 18**, ECPAT International Secretariat, 328 Phaya Thai Rd, Bangkok.

Ms Madriñán is available for advance interviews in Bangkok from April 16. Please contact her directly on mobile +66 (0)1-9294962.

ECPAT spokespersons from the following countries are available for media interviews on April 18: Brazil, Costa Rica, Denmark, India, Japan, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, Taiwan, United Kingdom, and Ukraine.

For more information on the ECPAT press conference and group spokespersons, contact: Karen Mangnall, ECPAT International communications officer, Tel: ++ 66-2-215-3388 ext 112 or email karenm@ecpat.net.

Mr Carr of CHIS is available for interview. For further information contact: Siobhan McCann in the NCH press office, UK on ++ 44 (0) 20 7704 7198 or email siobhan.mccann@nch.org.uk. Out of hours mobile: 07902 806 679.

Notes to editors:

1. ECPAT and CHIS will be publishing the responses to their call to action on a specially designed web site. See <http://www.make-it-safe.net>
2. ECPAT - End Child Pornography, Child Prostitution and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Exploitation, is an integral part of the UN's monitoring of child protection issues around the world. ECPAT chairs the special Subgroup against Sexual Exploitation of Children of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. ECPAT has 73 groups in 67 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. See www.ecpat.net
3. Members of the Children's Charities Coalition for Internet Safety (CHIS) include all of the UK's largest child welfare and child protection NGOs: Barnardos, Childline, National Children's Bureau, National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations, NCH: The Children's Charity, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and The Children's Society. See www.nch.org.uk/chis
4. The Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography has just delivered a report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on child pornography and the Internet. See www.ohchr.org/english/issues/children/rapporteur/annual05.htm
5. The traditional way for the Internet industry to resolve technical or other issues which cut across the interests of individual firms is to form industry working groups or working parties to hammer out a standard to which they can all subscribe, and which can be incorporated into their own products. This ensures inter-operability and consistency and can create a platform on which other products and services can be built.