

Hit back at child pornography

It's more barbaric than you think.
We have to keep cracking down

ERNIE ALLEN

MILLIONS of children around the world are being sexually abused and molested. Billions of dollars are changing hands as part of a growing crime wave of child pornography. This is anything but a victimless crime. Children — some as young as infants — are being barbarically assaulted for the sexual gratification of their abusers and those who view their photos.

While inroads have been made in the fight against child pornography, the problem remains severe. We have much more to do.

The Internet has become a child pornography superhighway, turning children into a commodity for sale or trade. Analysts at the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) have reviewed 9.6 million images and videos of child pornography on the Internet just since 2002. Law enforcement agencies are cracking down on this crime wave. Earlier this month the chief operating officer of the National Children's Museum in Washington was arrested and charged with distributing child pornography over the Internet.

Also this month, police across Europe announced that they had arrested nearly 100 people linked to a network that allegedly produced and sold child pornography videos to 2 500 customers worldwide.

In 1998 Congress asked NCMEC to create a "9-1-1 for the Internet". CyberTipline (www.cybertipline.com) was established, which has received more than 500 000 reports from the public and Internet service providers regarding child sexual exploitation. More than 460 000 of those reports involved child pornography.

What is child pornography? It goes far beyond nude pictures of children. It is the visual depiction — whether in still photos or videos — of children being sexually assaulted. In some instances, rapes of children have been shown live over the Internet to paying customers.

When NCMEC analysts scour the Internet for child pornography, they determine whether website content is illegal, use search tools and techniques to identify and track down the distributors of child pornography, and then provide the information to the appropriate



•• IN MANY PLACES
HAVING CHILD PORN
IS NOT ILLEGAL. ••

local, state, federal, or international law enforcement agency.

Law enforcement agencies and NCMEC have managed to identify almost 1 200 of the many children who appear in child pornography. We have found that 35% of the photos were taken by a parent, 15% by a family member and 20% by someone close to the child.

Sadly, NCMEC has found that the children being used in these images are getting younger. Of the children in pornographic photos and videos who have been identified, 58% had not yet reached puberty.

To stop the use of credit cards that fuel the child pornography industry, NCMEC created the Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography. Today this coalition includes 90% of the United States payments industry, with growing international involvement. In too many places around the world, the possession of child pornography is handled as a minor offence. In 136 countries it is not even a crime.

We need to do more to protect children from predators who want to harm them for pleasure and profit. We need to recognise child pornography as a crime against humanity that must be forcefully attacked and that deserves harsh punishment.

— The Christian
Science Monitor.

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