



INTERPOL

CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN UNIT

Victim Identification Laboratory VILAB



A HEINOUS CRIME

Child sexual abuse material consists of images or movies that are created during the commission of a crime against a child. The growth of the Internet has resulted in a massive increase in the amount of child sexual abuse material available, due to the relative ease and anonymity with which it can be uploaded and shared. The production of images and videos of child abuse is a crime that can have severe and lasting consequences on its young victims.

VICTIM-CENTRIC APPROACH

In seeking to combat this crime, INTERPOL promotes an approach that focuses on identifying the victims and removing them from further harm. The specialist field of victim identification involves the analysis of child abuse images and videos for clues on the location where the image was produced – the most significant step towards identifying the victims, as well as their abusers.

INTERPOL, through its Crimes Against Children Unit, has prioritized and encouraged member countries to take a victim-centric approach to child abuse investigations through the following:

- Guiding the international development of victim identification specialization as a policing discipline;
- Assisting member countries in developing national victim identification units;
- Establishing a Victim Identification Specialist Working Group;
- Approval by INTERPOL's member countries, during the 2011 General Assembly, of a Resolution "Promoting victim-centric management of child abuse material at the national level";
- Coordinating worldwide training in victim identification skills;
- Creating the INTERPOL Child Sexual Exploitation image database (ICSE), a global repository of child sexual abuse images found on the Internet.

We are enhancing our efforts in this area with establishment of the INTERPOL Victim Identification Laboratory (VILAB), a mobile tool that can be taken to conferences and other gatherings to display child abuse images from unsolved cases to a wider law enforcement audience, with the goal of identifying even more victims.

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A MOBILE INVESTIGATIVE TOOL

The INTERPOL VILAB is an application that allows users to view child sexual abuse images – which can be sanitized depending on the audience – from ongoing and unsolved investigations. As a mobile tool, it can be deployed at conferences, training courses or other law enforcement-related gatherings to bring these images to the widest possible audience. Viewers can leave comments on the images and elements that could potentially help investigators identify the location where the material was produced.

A GLOBAL SET OF EYES

Due to its mobility, the VILAB allows investigators to share the child sexual abuse images with people from different backgrounds, nationalities and areas of expertise. Objects seen in the images – a child's toy, a building seen through a window, a piece of furniture – might be unrecognizable to the investigator, but could be a landmark or a well-known item to someone from another country or region of the world. A greater variety of viewers increases the likelihood of spotting a clue to the location of the image, and therefore the identity of the victim or perpetrator.

STRONG PARTNERSHIP

The VILAB is a duplicate version of the SAVE (System for Advancing Victim Identification Efforts) system developed by the National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The hardware and software have been donated to INTERPOL by Canada, who have also provided training. Both systems will work in tandem, sharing material, statistical data and investigative information.

FUNCTIONALITY

Since it works using a server-based application, the VILAB is mobile and therefore able to be deployed in any of INTERPOL's member countries. It can be taken to law enforcement conferences, training sessions, working group meetings or other gatherings, allowing this specialized area of policing to include officers and authorities not normally involved in child sex abuse investigations. Under controlled circumstances, members of the public can also be included.

Users of the VILAB are able to view child sex abuse material from unsolved international cases. Editing tools allow viewers to zoom, rotate and manipulate the material to focus on different areas. The material included can be changed depending on the audience, and will always include the most up-to-date material from INTERPOL's ICSE database.

When viewing an image, users can post comments, tips or potentially relevant information regarding the image or its contents directly in the system. Investigators can then review the comments and follow up on any new leads that might be generated.

BENEFITS

- Maximizes the exposure of child sexual abuse material to law enforcement in INTERPOL's 190 member countries;
- Raises awareness of the issue and of victim identification, a new discipline in policing;
- Increases the possibility of more victims being identified and removed from harm;
- Mobility allows images to be shared with partners anytime, anywhere;
- Improves the effectiveness of victim identification training, by using real material from current cases;
- Helps generate new leads for unsolved child abuse cases;
- The VILAB will become a key element of the international policing strategy for combating crimes against children.



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