

The fight against sexual exploitation of children via the Internet

Paris Meeting on Missing and Sexually Exploited Children
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Speech by INTERPOL Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)

Your Majesties,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to have been asked to talk about how we at INTERPOL are working with law enforcement from your countries to help identify, locate and rescue children who are being sexually exploited and abused as a result of their or others' use of the Internet.

INTERPOL and its [186 member countries](#) have identified three areas that ought to be of particular concern to all of us.

1. The Internet presents a danger to children via chat-rooms where grown-ups engage in conversations with them in an attempt to 'groom' or get them 'ready' for subsequent sexual conduct, abuse or exploitation by procuring sexually explicit images of them or by facilitating meetings where physical abuse could occur.
2. The Internet permits child predators and paedophiles to view, purchase, sell or exchange images, films or videos depicting the explicit sexual abuse of children.
3. An emerging trend is where the Internet offers deceptive and disguised websites, such as 'young model sites,' where young girls are shown clothed and are presented as child models, but where in fact once you enter the site you can obtain explicit images of children being sexually abused or you can obtain access to the pictured girl herself so you can take your own photos or can physically abuse the girl yourself. I will come back to this disturbing development in a few minutes.

From early on in my career as a prosecutor back in 1988 until just several years ago, many people in society at large used to talk about 'child pornography' as though it were just a type of pornography – like there is pornography and there is child pornography. With experience, however, law enforcement and society at large began to recognise that the images, photos and movies of adults engaging in sexual acts with children or sexually explicit images of children were actually physical and visual evidence of crimes taking place.

Investigating this type of criminal conduct is hard on my colleagues. They are required to view these images daily – images of crimes that are so brutal in what they depict and that are committed against those who are the most vulnerable in our society that one never feels that enough is being done to stop it.

So, how have we been trying to do as much as possible to stop these crimes, to rescue these child victims and to bring the perpetrators to justice?

We have been using technology and an international network of experts to help identify, locate and rescue child victims. On the technology side, we developed the INTERPOL Child Abuse Image Database using the Swedish National Child Abuse Image Database as a template.

The principle is simple: the database takes an image and compares it automatically with images already stored in the database (more than 500,000). Thereafter, when a police officer seizes a child abuse image and asks, 'Who is this child?' and 'Is this sexual abuse still going on?', INTERPOL provides a way to get him or her answers quickly and efficiently.

By sending the image to INTERPOL, our unit can often tell whether this victim is already identified by comparing the image to other images in our database. The police officer who found the image can be told: 'We know her; she has been rescued' or 'This is a new image; here is what we need from you to help us.'

Let me give you a real case example:

In October 2003, the Swedish police discovered around 100 photos of a girl being sexually abused and sent the photos to INTERPOL's Trafficking in Human Beings Sub-Directorate, where our unit specialising in this area is located.

After viewing the images, INTERPOL's experts concluded that the photos were most probably produced somewhere in Eastern Europe.

Even after consulting an international network of specialised investigators, the exact location could not be established.

Almost two years later, in August 2005, in another part of the world, Canada's Toronto Police Service found 20 films. Instead of just putting the films in an unsolved case file at the national level, the films were sent to INTERPOL. The result: a match was made! The same girl that appeared in the Swedish photos appeared in these films.

With this new lead, the work at INTERPOL intensified. The films were manually and painstakingly analysed by Anders Persson (who has been seconded to INTERPOL by Sweden), who was able to find a film where the child victim could be heard saying a few words in a language Anders could not identify.

A sound-clip was extracted and sent to INTERPOL's National Central Bureaus in Eastern European countries. Staff at INTERPOL's headquarters in Lyon was also asked for help in identifying the language. It was ultimately determined that the language spoken by the young girl was Polish.

A report with all relevant information was sent to INTERPOL's National Central Bureau in Warsaw. A Polish police officer was sent to INTERPOL's headquarters for a period of one month to help INTERPOL further analyse the films.

It was determined that child sexual abuse depicted in the films probably occurred in Warsaw.

After several months of extremely good police work, the location was found, the young girl rescued and the perpetrator arrested.

This young girl was seven years old when the sexual abuse began and 11 years old when she was rescued. The abuser was a relative and her godfather.

What I just described shows how we combine technology with police expertise to solve cases, and it shows you how labour-intensive solving one case can be. But it also demonstrates that INTERPOL and its member countries can be very effective at fighting this criminal conduct.

From 2001 to 2006, using (1) INTERPOL's Child Abuse Image Database, (2) a network of 50 police specialists in 20 countries and (3) our 186 member countries' National Central Bureaus, INTERPOL has been able to increase the number of children identified, located and rescued from only 30 in 2001 to over 500 in 2006.

Our database of unique images related to children being sexually exploited has grown from 50,000 images in 2001 to over 500,000 in 2006.

INTERPOL's approach reduces the amount of duplicate investigative work – and often provides our member countries with the last piece of the puzzle needed to identify or locate a new victim. But the work of our specialised unit is ever increasing and never-ending.

For example, just two days ago we received a 200GB hard drive (like this) from the BKA (Federal Police) in Germany containing 120,000 images relating to or of child sexual abuse. What does this mean to our specialised unit?

As you will recall, each image is an image of a crime scene; each image therefore needs careful analysis, as it is likely to contain a number of leads that are important to the investigators. One never knows what clue might become that last piece of the puzzle.

For example, in previous years, INTERPOL has identified victims and abusers through a wide variety of small clues, such as a T-shirt with the name of a school in the US, a bottle of shampoo of a brand that was only marketed in Germany, landmarks, grass, rocks and posters on the wall. In order to identify these objects and link them to a specific place, INTERPOL works with botanists, geologists, private companies, the [International Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) and other experts.

A lot done, a lot more to do

New Project: Project Guardian

We are making information available to you today about a new area of fighting the sexual exploitation of children over the Internet in which INTERPOL wishes to embark. This is an area which is not covered by most national legislation and which we cannot attack using even the most sophisticated version of our INTERPOL Child Abuse Image Database.

This handout that I am holding, and that will be made available to you, is a modified image of an actual website that offers paid subscribers the possibility of seeing images of purported child models.

In order to attract their potential clients, these sites are often marketed as 'preteen glamour sites', 'Lolita series sites' or 'child erotica'. All of these titles only attempt to hide the fact that these children are in danger.

Children in these images and movies are generally shown partially clothed and sometimes in sexually explicit poses, stopping short of the lewd display of genitalia or sexual activity that would make them illegal in most of our countries. The use of lingerie, adult jewelry, suggestive poses and make-up are used to create the 'subtle' sexual overtones.

These sites sell themselves as harmless modeling or art sites.

INTERPOL and its member countries, however, have seen evidence that these sites are often only fronts or covers for the abuse of children. In fact, the two images on the left that have been blurred are of two actual child victims of sexual abuse who have been rescued. With regard to the other images, we just don't know, but we worry. Take a second and look at the modified website, and let me know if what you see does not also worry you.

What is even more disturbing is that sites like this one have been linked to organized crime. Where organized crime meets children under these circumstances, children become a disposable commodity.

How you can help

This one sheet of paper that I have been referring to (if properly handled) can help INTERPOL rescue a number of children who are currently the victims of sexual abuse. It can also help us arrest those responsible for these despicable crimes.

So, when thinking about what to do with this piece of paper, remember the story I told you about the 20 films found by Toronto's police which were not just ignored or filed away. The films were acted on by the police; they were given to someone who could help – they were given to INTERPOL. As a result, a child was rescued and a perpetrator arrested.

I do not know who the right person is in each of your countries to give this piece of paper to, but something tells me that each of you knows at least one person to whom you can give this sheet of paper and who will act on it.

Please make sure that person gets it.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.