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Third Dreamboard Member Sentenced to Life in Prison for Participating in International Criminal Network Organized to Sexually Exploit Children

WASHINGTON – A Wisconsin man was sentenced today to life in prison for his participation in an international criminal network, known as Dreamboard, dedicated to the sexual abuse of children and the creation and dissemination of graphic images and videos of child sexual abuse throughout the world, announced Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Stephanie Finley of the Western District of Louisiana and Director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) John Morton.

John Wyss, aka "Bones," 55, of Monroe, Wis., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Maurice Hicks in the Western District of Louisiana. On May 17, 2012, Wyss was found guilty after trial of one count of engaging in a child exploitation enterprise, one count of conspiracy to advertise child pornography and one count of conspiracy to distribute child pornography. Evidence presented at trial revealed that Wyss had been an active member of Dreamboard, an online child pornography bulletin board, since January 2008 and had made numerous postings revealing that he had produced child pornography by capturing images of minors engaging in sexually explicit activity via webcam, including one video in which adult males were engaged in sexual intercourse with prepubescent girls.

Wyss was charged in an indictment unsealed on Aug. 3, 2011. The charges against Wyss are the result of Operation Delego, an ongoing investigation that was launched in December 2009 that targeted individuals around the world for their participation in Dreamboard. Dreamboard was a private, members-only, online bulletin board that was created and operated to promote pedophilia and encourage the sexual abuse of very young children, in an environment designed to avoid law enforcement detection.

A total of 72 individuals, including Wyss, have been charged as a result of Operation Delego. To date, 56 of the 72 charged defendants have been arrested in the United States and abroad. Forty-three individuals have pleaded guilty, and Wyss was convicted after a four-day jury trial. Forty of the 43 individuals who have pleaded guilty for their roles in the conspiracy have been sentenced to prison and have received sentences ranging between 15 years and life in prison. Wyss is the third defendant to receive a life sentence. Thirteen of the 72 charged individuals remain at large and are known only by their online identities. Efforts to identify and apprehend these individuals continue. Operation Delego represents the largest prosecution to date in the United States of individuals who participated in an online bulletin board conceived and operated for the sole purpose of promoting child sexual abuse, disseminating child pornography and evading law enforcement.

According to court documents and information presented at trial, Wyss and other Dreamboard members traded graphic images and videos of adults molesting children 12 years-old and under, often violently, and collectively created a massive private library of images of child sexual abuse. The international group prized and encouraged the creation of new images and videos of child sexual abuse.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Dreamboard members employed a variety of measures designed to conceal their criminal activity from detection by law enforcement. Members

communicated using aliases or “screen names,” rather than their actual names. Links to child pornography posted on Dreamboard were required to be encrypted with a password that was shared only with other members. Members accessed the board via proxy servers, which routed internet traffic through other computers so as to disguise a user's actual location and prevent law enforcement from tracing internet activity. Dreamboard members also encouraged the use of encryption programs on their computers, which password-protect computer files to prevent law enforcement from accessing them in the event of a court-authorized search.

Membership was tightly controlled by the administrators of the bulletin board, who required prospective members to upload child pornography portraying children 12 years of age or younger when applying for membership. Once they were given access, members were required continually to upload images of child sexual abuse in order to maintain membership. Members who failed to follow this rule would be expelled from the group.

According to court documents, Dreamboard members were divided into groups based on status and ranking. The highest level of membership was “Super VIP.” Individuals who obtained that title had created new images of child pornography by molesting children and shared those images with the board administrators. The next level of membership was “Super VIP,” which was comprised of trusted members of the website. The next level after Super VIP was the VIP rank. Individuals in the lowest level of membership were called Members. Those in the lower ranks could only access a limited quantity of child pornography on the bulletin board. The higher the rank, the more material was available to the member. Individuals advanced to higher levels of membership by providing child abuse images that the individual had produced, providing a large number of images, or providing images that had never been seen before.

The bulletin board included rules of conduct, printed in English, Russian, Japanese and Spanish. The rules required prospective members to upload material depicting children under the age of 12 engaged in sexually explicit activity. Approved members were required to observe strict posting rules designed to encourage members to disseminate large quantities of child pornography, thwart efforts by law enforcement to identify members of the board, and encourage members to sexually abuse children in order to produce new material for the board. The board rules also required members to organize postings based on the type of content. One particular category was entitled “Super Hardcore.” The rules for that category described in graphic language that the only posts permitted were those involving adults having violent sexual intercourse with “very young kids” who were being subjected to both physical and sexual abuse and were obviously “in distress, and or crying.”

Operation Delego involved extensive international cooperation to identify and apprehend Dreamboard members abroad. Through coordination between ICE; the Department of Justice; Eurojust, the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit; and dozens of law enforcement agencies throughout the world, 20 Dreamboard members across five continents and 14 countries have been arrested to date outside the United States, including two of the five lead administrators of the board. Those countries include Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Kenya, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Qatar, Serbia, Sweden and Switzerland. Numerous foreign investigations related to Operation Delego remain ongoing. The location and arrest of Dreamboard members abroad have led to the capture and investigation of other global targets.

Evidence obtained during the operation revealed that at least 38 children across the world were suffering sexual abuse at the hands of the members of the group. Efforts by federal, state, local and international law enforcement to locate and identify the victims of sexual abuse and exploitation by Dreamboard members are ongoing.

Operation Delego is a spinoff investigation from leads developed through “Operation Nest Egg,” the prosecution of another online group dedicated to the sharing and dissemination of child pornography. Operation Nest Egg was a spinoff investigation developed from leads related to another international investigation, “Operation Joint Hammer,” which targeted transnational rings of child pornography trafficking.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by U.S. Attorneys' offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John "Luke" Walker of the Western District of Louisiana and Trial Attorney Keith Becker of CEOS. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs provided substantial assistance. The investigation was conducted by ICE-Homeland Security Investigations, the Child Exploitation Section of ICE's Cyber Crime Center, CEOS, CEOS's High Technology Investigative Unit and 35 ICE offices in the United States and 11 ICE attaches offices in 13 countries around the world, with assistance provided by numerous local and international law enforcement agencies across the United States and throughout the world.

The investigation was part of Operation Predator, a nationwide ICE initiative to identify, investigate and arrest those who prey on children, including human traffickers, international sex tourists, Internet pornographers and foreign-national predators whose crimes make them deportable.

ICE encourages the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators.

12-1085

Criminal Division