



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY, APRIL 28, 2008
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CRM
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888

SECOND DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY IN PENSACOLA IN INTERNATIONAL CHILD EXPLOITATION ENTERPRISE CASE

WASHINGTON AND PENSACOLA, Fla. – Stepan Bondarenko, 38, of Philadelphia became the second defendant to plead guilty for his involvement in a vast global child pornography trafficking enterprise, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Florida Gregory R. Miller and FBI Executive Assistant Director J. Stephen Tidwell announced today.

Bondarenko was one of 14 alleged members of the enterprise who were charged in a 40-count superseding indictment on March 19, 2008. He pleaded guilty today to four counts relating to his criminal activities as a member of the group: engaging in a child exploitation enterprise; conspiracy to advertise, transport, ship, receive and possess child pornography; advertising child pornography; and receiving child pornography.

Bondarenko admitted to participating in a highly-sophisticated and well-organized criminal enterprise whose purpose was to proliferate child sex abuse images to its membership over a two year period. According to Bondarenko's guilty plea, members of the illegal organization utilized Internet newsgroups - large file-sharing networks where text, software, pictures and videos can be traded and shared - to traffic in illegal images and videos depicting pre-pubescent children, including toddlers, engaged in various sexual and sadistic acts. Group members utilized sophisticated encryption methods to avoid detection and traded more than 400,000 images and videos of child sexual abuse before being dismantled by law enforcement. The charges were developed after law enforcement infiltrated the group in August 2006.

Bondarenko faces a minimum prison sentence of 20 years and a maximum of life imprisonment, in addition to statutory fines. He will be sentenced on July 8, 2008.

The first defendant to enter a guilty plea in this case, Warren Weber, 56, of Boise, Idaho, pleaded guilty to five related charges on April 17, 2008, and is scheduled to be sentenced on June 24, 2008. Trial for the remaining defendants is scheduled to begin on June 2, 2008, in Pensacola, Fla., before Senior U.S. District Judge Lacey A. Collier. The remaining defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

The case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorneys' Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and

prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit <http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov/>.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney David Goldberg of the Northern District of Florida and Trial Attorney LisaMarie Freitas of the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. The case is being investigated by the FBI and the Queensland, Australia, Police Service, with the assistance of the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) Child Pornography Unit in Germany, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre in the United Kingdom and the Toronto, Canada, Police Department.

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