



Department of Justice

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ATTORNEY GENERAL AND DHS SECRETARY ANNOUNCE LARGEST U.S. PROSECUTION OF INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL NETWORK ORGANIZED TO SEXUALLY EXPLOIT CHILDREN

Members of Online Child Pornography Community Arrested on Five Continents

WASHINGTON – Attorney General Eric Holder and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano announced today the unsealing of three indictments and one complaint charging a total of 72 individuals for their participation in an international criminal network dedicated to the sexual abuse of children and the creation and dissemination of graphic images and videos of child sexual abuse throughout the world. Attorney General Holder and Secretary Napolitano announced the charges with Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, Director of U.S. Immigration of Customs Enforcement (ICE) John Morton and U.S. Attorney Stephanie Finley of the Western District of Louisiana.

Operation Delego, an ongoing investigation that was launched in December 2009, targeted the 72 charged defendants and more than 500 additional individuals around the world for their participation in Dreamboard – 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. To date, 52 of the 72 charged defendants have been arrested in the United States and abroad. 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 – numerous Dreamboard members sexually abused children, produced images and videos of the abuse, and shared the images and videos with other members of Dreamboard. 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.

“The members of this criminal network shared a demented dream to create the preeminent online community for the promotion of child sexual exploitation but for the children they victimized, this was nothing short of a nightmare,” said Attorney General Holder. “This operation marks another important step forward in our work to protect

children across - and beyond - this country. Our nation's fight to protect the rights, interests, and safety of children goes on, and it will continue to be a top priority of this Justice Department."

"This operation is an example of the good work that DHS, through its principal investigative arm, ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), does every year in cooperation with our domestic and international law enforcement partners to protect children," said Secretary Napolitano. "We take our responsibility to protect our children seriously, and this case is a prime example of how cooperation can bring real results."

"As alleged in court documents, Dreamboard was a self-described global 'community' of pedophiles dedicated to the relentless victimization and exploitation of children 12 and under," said Assistant Attorney General Breuer. "Using sophisticated methods to evade detection by law enforcement, Dreamboard members allegedly used the power and anonymity of the Internet to motivate each other to commit their horrific acts of sexual abuse of minors and trading in child pornography. The charges unsealed today show the department's continued commitment to a strategy of targeting the most sophisticated child exploitation networks, at home and abroad. No matter how savvy online predators think they are, we will find them, dismantle their networks, and bring them to justice."

"These indictments capture the activity of a major, global child pornography and exploitation enterprise whose primary objective was to sexually abuse vulnerable children," said U.S. Attorney Finley. "I hope that these charges send a clear message that we will prosecute to the fullest extent of the law those who participate in this type of activity. We will continue to aggressively pursue these criminals to ensure that there is no place to hide - not in the United States, not anywhere around the globe."

"The dismantling of Dreamboard is another stark warning to would-be child predators who think they can trade in child pornography and commit heinous acts against innocent children while hiding behind pseudonyms and other technological tricks," said ICE Director John Morton. "As these criminals try new techniques to digitally erase their trail, ICE's Homeland Security Investigations along with our U.S. and international law enforcement partners continue to upgrade our strategies and technology to track down the depraved individuals who bring suffering to children."

According to court documents filed in the Western District of Louisiana and elsewhere, 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.”

All 72 of the defendants are charged with conspiring to advertise and distribute child pornography, and 50 of them are also charged with engaging in a child pornography enterprise. The charges and arrests were conducted in three separate phases over the course of the operation. Twenty-eight defendants were charged and 19 were arrested during phase one of the operation; 22 defendants were charged and 17 were arrested during phase two of the operation; and 22 defendants were charged and 16 arrested during phase three of the operation.

Thirteen of the 52 individuals arrested have pleaded guilty. To date, 20 of the 72 charged individuals remain at large and are known only by their online identities. Efforts to identify and apprehend these individuals continue.

Four of the 13 individuals who have pleaded guilty for their roles in the conspiracy have been sentenced to prison. On May 10, 2011, Timothy Lee Gentry, 33, of Burlington, Ky., was sentenced to 25 years in prison. On May 31, 2011, Michael Biggs, 32, of Orlando, Fla., was sentenced to 20 years in prison. On June 22, 2011, Michael Childs, 49, of Huntsville, Ala., was sentenced to 30 years in prison. On July 14, 2011, Charles Christian, 49, of Tilton, Ill., was sentenced to more than 22 years in prison. Each defendant also received a lifetime of supervised release following his release from prison as part of their sentence.

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, 19 Dreamboard members across five continents and 13 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, 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.

To date, law enforcement has confirmed that 15 arrested Dreamboard members personally created child pornography. For example, during his July 11, 2011, guilty plea, Anthony Sowders, 28, of Middlesboro, Ky., admitted that he posted on Dreamboard sexually explicit images of female children that he had created via a webcam. 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.

An indictment is merely an allegation and defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John "Luke" Walker of the Western District of Louisiana and Trial Attorneys Keith Becker and Anitha Ibrahim of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS) of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs provided substantial assistance. The investigation was conducted by ICE HSI, 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.

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