

JUSTICE NEWS

Remarks by Attorney General Holder at the Biannual Global Alliance Conference Against Child Sexual Abuse Online

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Thank you all for being here today – and for your extraordinary leadership in our collective fight against child abuse and victimization.

I am delighted to welcome you all to Washington, D.C., for this important conference. It's a pleasure to host such a distinguished group of leaders, experts, and allies from around the world. And it's a great privilege to join you today in renewing our shared commitment to protecting the safety, the well-being, and the essential rights of all children.

Two years ago, when Commissioner [Cecelia] Malmstrom and I first convened the Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Online, in Brussels, all of the countries present took a firm stand – together – to end the sexual exploitation of children in cyberspace. We adopted a multifaceted approach to halting its spread, assisting its victims, and punishing its perpetrators. And we committed ourselves – and our respective nations – to ambitious goals: eliminating legal loopholes that have accelerated the distribution of illegal and reprehensible material; setting benchmarks for identifying victims of exploitation; and facilitating investigations and prosecutions that require intensive cross-border cooperation. And our numbers have grown – today, more than 50 countries have joined this initiative.

Every day over the last two years, we have worked diligently not only to meet those goals – but to surpass them. This is a commitment that I and my colleagues at the United States Department of Justice have taken extremely seriously from the beginning of the Obama Administration, launching aggressive efforts to prosecute child exploitation and child pornography. In fact, over the past six years, alongside our partner agencies, both domestic and international, my department has conducted more than two dozen global operations targeting organized online groups. And we've taken action against more than 5,000 criminals within the United States who are dedicated to the sexual abuse of children and the use of online networking platforms to traffic in child pornography.

For instance, this past March, the department obtained a 30-year sentence against a U.S. citizen who served as an English teacher in China, using that position of authority to molest children under the age of 12 and to produce child pornography. Just two months ago, we obtained a sentence of 120 years against a noncommissioned officer in the U.S. military who had drugged and sexually abused children, producing images and videos of that horrific abuse. And beyond these efforts, since 2009, our Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces have provided training to over 226,000 people, including law enforcement officers, forensic interviewers, computer forensic examiners, prosecutors, and others. The Task Forces have conducted well over 200,000 investigations into over a quarter million complaints of child exploitation. And these efforts have resulted in the arrests of over 33,000 people.

Together, this work has enabled us to intervene to rescue numerous child victims suffering at the hands of abusers; to arrest and prosecute those who did them harm; and to begin the long process of healing for each one of these survivors. This is important, life-changing work that mirrors the efforts so many of you

are leading in your home countries. I have no doubt that it will continue – and be amplified – by the work we’re discussing today.

But I also know – as so many of us have seen – that if this progress is to continue, we need to focus not only on intervention and robust enforcement, but also on prevention. By educating children about the risks they may face when they go online, we can help prevent them from being exposed to dangerous situations. I appreciate – and applaud – the variety of creative approaches that many of you are taking to raise public awareness about these risks. I am especially impressed with the strategies that leaders in this room have developed to educate young people by using the same online and social media venues where they are most likely to be approached by would-be abusers. These efforts will help to keep more and more kids safe, to make their parents savvier about the online world, and to put a stop to child abuse before it starts.

If and when tragic acts do occur, however, we must also stand ready to ensure that victims receive every opportunity to recover and rebound. We can all be heartened by the collaborations and partnerships that are being forged as we speak between government agencies and nongovernmental victim-services organizations in many of our member nations. And I want to take just a moment to commend every one of the organizations – some of which are represented here – that have dedicated themselves to supporting victims at every stage of their daunting journeys to recovery. These services are badly needed. They are greatly appreciated. And they help to transform and even save lives. Victims of such heinous crimes often carry deep scars throughout their lifetimes, and we must never forget that their healing is an essential component of our broader effort to do justice.

Of course, even as we lift up these courageous victims, we must continue to bear down relentlessly on those who have inflicted, and continue to inflict, such profound trauma. Like many of you, the United States is enhancing our efforts to investigate cases of child sexual abuse online, and to identify and prosecute offenders. As I mentioned, thanks to efforts like our Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces, we are seeing higher and higher numbers of arrests and convictions of online predators. And I would like to take a moment to recognize our moderator, Drew Oosterbaan, who as Chief of the Department of Justice’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, has led a remarkable team of dedicated men and women who have worked heroically within the United States – and with their equally heroic partners from your countries – to protect children worldwide.

And over the past two years, I know several of your countries also have taken laudable steps to strengthen your own domestic efforts – adopting or proposing new laws that broaden the scope of prosecutable conduct within your borders. Together, as a global community, we are making it easier for individuals to report online sexual abuse. And we are working more closely than ever with the private sector to identify and remove illegal materials from the Internet.

These are promising advances, and – as we’ll be discussing today – we must maintain our collective focus to keep up this progress. Yet, even with the steps that have been taken – and the great work that’s underway – there’s no denying that the threat to children online still exists in every Global Alliance nation. And difficult work remains ahead.

If we hope to end this threat and protect our children, we must seize this opportunity – here and now – to reaffirm our collective commitment to this cause, and to this vital partnership. We must continue to work in tandem, to share insights and expertise, and to learn from one another’s successes and challenges. And we must continue to grow more and more nimble – and strive to stay ahead of rapidly-evolving technologies – in order to reduce and eradicate the online exploitation of children.

Recent technological advances have the potential to greatly embolden online criminals, providing new methods for abusers to avoid detection. In some cases, perpetrators are using cloud storage to cheaply and easily store tens of thousands of images and videos outside of any home or business – and to access

those files from anywhere in the world. Many take advantage of encryption and anonymizing technology to conceal contraband materials and disguise their locations. And through unceasing innovations in mobile technology, predators are continually finding more opportunities to entice trusting minors to share explicit images of themselves.

Fortunately, thanks to the hard work of the Global Alliance countries, we are fighting back on every front – by embracing revolutionary technological tools in many aspects of this effort, from prevention through interdiction. New investigative techniques are enabling us to crack the increasingly elaborate mechanisms that criminals use to mask their identities and conceal their physical locations. Collaborative technology is allowing us to identify and help more victims on a global scale. And, just as we do to raise awareness, going to common sites of exploitation – on the Internet, on social media, and on mobile technologies – is allowing us to get to know the terrain and to engage directly with minors who might be susceptible to manipulation and abuse.

We are also stepping up our efforts to build strong partnerships with technology companies, which can be important allies in this fight. As you heard this morning, a number of private-sector leaders have developed their own databases and methodologies, such as PhotoDNA, to identify and eliminate child sex abuse materials trafficked on their servers, and to report offending users to the appropriate law enforcement officials. I thank each and every one of these innovators for their outstanding work, their partnership, and their commitment to innovating alongside us. And going forward, I am confident that these relationships will only become more critical to making the Internet a safer space for children around the world. Moreover, we would hope that technology companies would be willing to work with us to ensure that law enforcement retains the ability, with court-authorization, to lawfully obtain information in the course of an investigation, such as catching kidnappers and sexual predators. It is fully possible to permit law enforcement to do its job while still adequately protecting personal privacy. When a child is in danger, law enforcement needs to be able to take every legally available step to quickly find and protect the child and to stop those that abuse children. It is worrisome to see companies thwarting our ability to do so.

Now, just as we eliminate safe havens for perpetrators in the virtual world, we must also strive to eliminate them off-line. We've seen that some of the most dangerous criminals will not hesitate to migrate, physically and online, to nations where they think they can remain anonymous. That migration is making online child exploitation an increasingly borderless crime, as perpetrators collude in order to attempt to evade law enforcement by jurisdiction-hopping. And that is precisely why this Alliance is so vital – and why it remains in the interest of every nation to continue working together to build our collective defenses.

We cannot – and we will not – allow jurisdictional challenges to stand in the way of investigations that need to traverse national borders. Investigators must be able to share lead information with each other directly and immediately, and then be able to attain swift access to evidence they require to locate and apprehend those who victimize children – and to shut down their exploitative enterprises – before they are able to slip away. This Alliance presents a united effort – and a unique opportunity – to address jurisdictional impediments and ensure that abusers cannot evade detection and prosecution. In particular, I urge that whenever our countries meet to discuss how we can share evidence across borders in a digital age, while at the same time protecting privacy – and whenever we negotiate agreements that touch on international law enforcement information sharing – that we together pledge that we will ensure that our experts on child exploitation are always part of the discussions and negotiations. They are on the cutting edge, and know better than anyone that we must find ways to expand, not curb, international law enforcement cooperation that protects our most vulnerable citizens.

As you know, we have already achieved remarkable success by working together. Many of you remember Operation Delego, when the Justice Department and other U.S. law enforcement agencies collaborated with international partners – including Eurojust, Interpol and Europol – to bring down a child pornography

ring spanning 14 countries and five continents. This afternoon, you will hear about a number of other exploiters of children operating across borders, who have been apprehended as a result of effective and timely international cooperation.

Such operational successes illustrate the power – and the potential – of strong, committed nations working together – in common cause, in good faith, and with mutual resolve – to solve global problems and forge truly international solutions. In the months and years ahead, as threats to our children continue to evolve, in every corner of the globe, we need – more than ever – to draw upon the collective experience of every country, and the cooperation of every community, to protect our young citizens and hold abusers accountable to the fullest extent of the law.

I want you to know that I will always be personally committed to these efforts – and determined not only to help develop and expand their application, but to institutionalize their relevance so that those who come after us can build on the progress that, together, we have set in motion. My own tenure at the U.S. Department of Justice will draw to a close in the months ahead. But the commitment of the Obama Administration, the U.S. government, and American citizens and businesses will only grow stronger.

Like you, I have no illusions that the work ahead will be easy, or that the progress we seek will take hold overnight. But as I look around this room – at the dedicated ministers, state secretaries, experts and other public servants who have made the cause of child protection their own – I cannot help but feel optimistic about where your work will lead us. I am grateful for – and inspired by – your devotion to this effort. I have been proud to count you as colleagues and as friends over the past six years. And I look forward to all that our nations will accomplish together in the critical days ahead.

Thank you.

Component:

Office of the Attorney General