

Prague declaration

A new European approach for safer Internet for children

Ministerial Conference **“Safer Internet for Children – fighting together against illegal content and conduct on-line”**

20th April 2009

We, the Ministers and representatives of the Governments of the European Union and Norway responsible for safer use of the Internet by children and communication technologies, together with European Commission, met in Prague, Czech Republic, on 20 April 2009 for the Conference of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union on "A new European approach for a safer Internet for children", and agreed on the following declaration:

We, the representatives of Switzerland together with our international partners met in Prague, Czech Republic, on 20 April 2009 for the Conference of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union on "A new European approach for a safer Internet for children", and agreed on the principles of following declaration:

I. We acknowledge

1. that the rapid development of the Internet and other communication technologies has given rise to a new economic sector, with new flows of information, products and services across the internal and external borders of the EU;
2. that the Internet and mobile phones allowing children and young people to benefit from access to various content and allowing them to choose between an ever-increasing range of new and innovative communications services;
3. that the Internet and mobile phones have become part of daily life for children and young people, who benefit from them by exchanging publicly available content, and by being creative and by producing and sharing their own content, whether text, images or videos, for cultural and technological understanding, for communication, entertainment and for learning, both at home and in the school environment;
4. that although children and young people are often expert users of online technologies and aware of both risks and ways of dealing with them, they are not all mature in the sense of being able to evaluate the situations that they encounter and the possible consequences. At the same time they will seldom share their experiences with their parents or carers and will only turn to them for help as a last resort. There is also a gap between the increasing presence of threats on the Internet and awareness of them on the part of both children and parents. Better information for both children and parents and their empowerment to take measures against the risks are therefore necessary;

5. that in order to encourage citizens to exploit the opportunities and enjoy the positive benefits offered by the Internet and other communications technologies, measures promoting their safer use are also needed;
6. that the Internet has become one of the main distribution channels for materials depicting sexual abuse of children;
7. that the access and spread of the Internet and the anonymity it can provide, as well as technological advances such as high-speed connections and digital cameras, have made it easier for individuals with a sexual interest in children to produce and upload child sexual abuse material, download files or access, view and share this material online;
8. that exposure to harmful content, such as pornographic material and extremely violent content, on the Internet and mobile phones can disturb children. Also that being exposed on the internet as a victim of sexual abuse and of violence is even more disturbing because of the revictimization every time the images or videos of the sexual abuse or violence are downloaded again, which can be the case for years to come.
9. that cyberbullying is a severe form of harmful conduct, which can be particularly distressing for the child victim;
10. that grooming children can be seriously and deeply disturbing even where the contact stops before the abuse takes place;
11. that the identification, location and safeguarding of all child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation through the use of technology is of the utmost consideration in all efforts to tackle the wide-ranging and complex nature of this issue.
12. that safer Internet use is an issue which cuts across a number of policy areas and also involves the work of a number of international organizations;
13. that it is a shared responsibility for policy makers, law enforcement authorities, the private sector, schools and civil society to make the online environment safer; that the international dimension of cooperation between law enforcement authorities and other stakeholders represents one of its most important features;

14. that young people can contribute to their own and other children's safety online by taking part in discussions and providing advice to policy-makers, parents and teachers;
15. that there is a need to expand and update knowledge on children's use of new media, of the risks they could face, and also to assess the effectiveness of the solutions which have been put in place to improve children's safety;
16. that, via the Safer Internet programmes and the European Commission, the EU can justly claim to be a world leader in this policy area and has launched several actions that have proved their effectiveness: namely a European network of hotlines (reporting points where members of the public can report illegal content), a European awareness-raising network and annual "Safer Internet Days" co-ordinated by the network, information for parents through independent testing of the effectiveness of filtering software, and support for private sector self-regulatory initiatives in the area of content rating and mobile phones;
17. that, with the new Safer Internet programme for 2009 - 2013, the European Union can make an important contribution to child Internet education and safety, both internally and internationally;
18. that the Safer Internet Plus programme supports the joint project of Member States' law enforcement authorities (CIRCAMP) that is aimed at preventing the distribution of child sexual abuse material and at investigating the groups involved;
19. that law enforcement cooperation and public-private partnership in the fight against crime, including child sexual abuse and Internet-related crime, is also supported by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime programme of the European Commission;
20. that the experience in a number of Member States involving cooperation between public authorities and Internet service providers in blocking access to websites containing child sexual abuse material shows that this can be one very valuable component in the fight against child sexual abuse and exploitation;

21. that Europol plays an important role in supporting the Member States' efforts to prevent and combat the activities of criminal networks involved in the production, sale or distribution of child sexual abuse material and associated forms of crime, such as the sexual exploitation of children;
22. that Eurojust has carried out activities as a result of the international interest and concern about fighting this type of crime;
23. that Interpol's unique position in the international law enforcement community and its resources, such as the Interpol Child Abuse Image Database (ICAID) and Interpol Green Notices, give it an important role in fighting this type of crime effectively at international level. The further development of these tools by sharing information with dedicated entities in member countries or with the public (search for wanted persons) will lead to concrete results in terms of prevention and law enforcement.

II. We welcome

1. the fact that the scope of the Safer Internet Programme, which is to promote safer use of the Internet and other communication technologies, has been extended to fighting illegal and harmful conduct, such as grooming and cyberbullying;
2. the proposal from the European Commission to update the Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA¹, in particular the provisions aimed at strengthening efforts to combat online child sexual abuse material and grooming;
3. the Council Conclusions on setting up national alert platforms and a European alert platform for reporting offences noted on the Internet, including child sexual abuse material, and enhancing cooperation, exchange of information and experience in fighting against illegal content and harmful conduct online at international level. This initiative is also part of a concerted work strategy and practical measures against cybercrime adopted by the Council on 27 - 28 November 2008;
4. the initiative of the European Commission to set up a European Financial Coalition against commercial child sexual abuse material, whose aim it is to bring together all stakeholder groups engaged in the fight against the commercial distribution of images of child sexual abuse on the Internet, in order to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children by the manufacture, distribution and sale of child sexual abuse material on the Internet.

¹ Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA of 22 December 2003 on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, OJ L 13, 20.1.2004, p. 44

III. We commit

1. to support politically and financially the implementation of the Safer Internet Programme for 2009 - 2013 at national level and to work with resolve in order to promote a safe and responsible use of the Internet and ensure the safety of children with regard to child sexual abuse material in its various forms;
2. to ensure that the European Union maintains its leading role in combating online child sexual abuse material and encourages cooperation with third States;
3. to ensure public awareness and to reduce the generation gap, by coordinating and supporting awareness actions targeting children, their parents, carers and teachers, and to contribute to the exchange of information and best practice at European level;
4. to encourage the involvement of young people in discussions concerning child safety online;
5. to ensure the use of the most effective forms of action to fight illegal content and to avoid duplication of stakeholder activities;
6. to ensure cooperation between public authorities and the private sector, in particular Internet service providers, to explore the possibility to remove illegal child sexual abuse material from the Internet at source and where this may not be possible, to identify and to block, disrupt or make more difficult access from the EU to websites containing child sexual abuse material;
7. to explore the establishment of mechanisms, in co-operation with ISPs and law enforcement services, to detect and identify the distribution of child abuse material across peer-to-peer networks, and to establish arrangements for referring such identification to the relevant law enforcement authority for investigation;
8. to provide political leadership at national, European and international level to reduce illegal content and tackle harmful conduct online. To reinforce at national level the cooperation between law enforcement authorities and civil hotlines, non-governmental organisations and judicial authorities and other public and private stakeholders;

9. to promote a holistic approach to fighting child exploitation on the Internet by encouraging countries to exchange information and trends on cybercrime, to coordinate joint operations between countries, and facilitate cross-border investigations. To intensify cross-border cooperation, in particular by supporting the setting up of the new European alert platform and by taking into account the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. To facilitate the exchange of information among law enforcement authorities at European and international levels;
10. to promote a safer online environment by fostering and assessing private sector self-regulatory initiatives, and by supporting initiatives providing parental control tools as well as positive content for children;
11. to support the child victims of Internet-related crimes;
12. to support the development of knowledge on the use of the Internet and new technologies by children, on risks and on evaluations of solutions.

IV. We ask the European Commission

1. to implement the Safer Internet Programme for 2009 – 2013. On the basis of its outcomes and an impact analysis of this programme, and with regard to technological and social development, to continue these activities after 2013 in such way as to assure the EU's leading role in this field;
2. to promote the exchange of best practice in the area of Safer Internet use at both European level and international level;
3. to encourage representatives of the private sector and civil society, as well as law enforcement authorities and judicial authorities, to exchange best practice and to facilitate cooperation;
4. to continue stimulating a dialogue on European level with the private sector, especially internet service providers, aiming at encouraging them to adopt self-regulation measures, in a similar approach to the existing examples, the European Framework for Safer Mobile Use by Younger Teenagers and Children, signed on 6 February 2007 and the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU, signed on 10 February 2009.

V. We invite

1. Member States to facilitate cooperation and exchange of information among law enforcement agencies;
 2. the representatives of civil society, in particular child welfare and parents NGOs, to cooperate with government, law enforcement authorities and the private sector to help in shaping best safety solutions, defining awareness strategies and promoting a safer online environment;
 3. the private sector, in particular Internet service providers, mobile operators, content providers, social networking sites and software companies to contribute to the empowerment and protection of minors using the Internet and to the fight against child sexual abuse and exploitation, in particular child sexual abuse material, through self-regulation, development of safety tools, awareness raising, and cooperation with civil society and governments and law enforcement authorities.
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