

Panel on Online Sexual Exploitation of Children

Panama City, Panama
11 May 2017

On 11 May 2017, Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children hosted a panel discussion in Panama City, Panama to discuss the issue of online sexual exploitation of children. The panel was held on the occasion of the GNRC 5th Global Forum, a gathering of religious leaders, United Nations officials, leaders of faith-based organizations, and representatives of grassroots organizations. The 5th Forum addressed the theme of Violence Against Children: Faith Communities in Action.

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) is one of many forms of violence against children. The prevalence of online CSEA has been on the rise in recent years. In 2010, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) collected 13 million child sex abuse material (CSAM) images, while in 2013, they collected 24 million CSAM images. Technology that makes it easier to distribute CSAM, such as webcams, Peer to Peer (P2P) file sharing, and untraceable browsers, is also growing more prevalent. CSEA presents a unique challenge for policy makers and law enforcement agencies, as internet technologies change rapidly and abuse often goes undiscovered and is repeated.

The panel included two CSEA specialists, Ms. Dorothy Rozga and Mr. John Carr, and two religious leaders, Reverend Que English and Rabbi Diana Gerson, who actively address this issue in their communities. It was moderated by Rebeca Rios-Kahn, Director of Arigatou International – Prayer and Action for Children NYC. The following is brief summary of the event.

Dorothy Rozga— Executive Director of ECPAT International

Ms. Dorothy Rozga joined ECPAT in 2013 after serving as the interim Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum based in Ethiopia. For ten years, she served in Africa as UNICEF's Representative to Tanzania, as Deputy Regional Director of UNICEF's Regional Office for East and Southern Africa located in Kenya, and as Representative to Ghana. Prior to joining UNICEF, Dorothy was a Peace Corp Volunteer in Jamaica and Belize (1977-81). Between 1973-1977, she was the Executive Director of Volunteer Services of Greater Kalamazoo in the USA.



Ms. Rozga began her presentation by naming the different types of sexual exploitation children face online. First she mentioned computer-generated child sexual abuse/exploitation material, in which images depict artificially created children. These images normalise the sexual exploitation of children. Next she discussed the online grooming of children for sexual purposes. This involves abusers communicating with children over the Internet in order to establish relationships with them and facilitate either online or offline sexual contact. This can lead to various forms of sexual abuse, including forcing children to perform sexual acts in front of a webcam. She then talked about online sexual extortion of children, which occurs when an adult blackmails a child with self-generated sexual images in order to demand sexual favours or money under the threat of sharing the material. Finally she brought up live streaming of child abuse, which refers to offenders watching the sexual abuse of children online. Usually there are intermediaries, such as a child's family member or people from the child's community, who force the child to 'perform' in front of a webcam. This practice is primarily found in Southeast Asia, she noted, but recent reports indicate that it is now spreading to other regions of the world with high levels of poverty, limited child protection measures, and easy access to children.

Ms. Rozga then shared some sobering statistics about online child exploitation. 270,000 out of the 1.8 billion total images uploaded daily are child sexual abuse images. In 2014, the age group breakdown of online exploitation victims was 21% pubescent, 72% pre-pubescent, and 7% infant. Between January 2010 and December 2012, there was a 125% increase in the number of images depicting severe sexual activity. She noted that 38% of abusers in child abuse images are the child's parents, and 10% are other relatives of the children.

Next she discussed the mission of the organization WeProtect. WeProtect is a global multi-stakeholder response to combating online child abuse and exploitation. She shared WeProtect's model of national response for preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse, which advocated for the following measures:

1. Strong government leadership, nationally coordinated monitoring of CSEA risk, and comprehensive and effective domestic legislation.
2. Trained, victim-focused, and dedicated police, judges and prosecutors, a multi-agency system to manage and rehabilitate child sex offenders to prevent their reoffending, and image databases to reduce the risk for repeated investigations of child sexual abuse material by law enforcement.



3. End-to-end support for CSEA victims to help them cope with the immediate impact of their abuse and recover from the harm experienced, a statutory workforce that is trained, coordinated and available to provide support to CSEA victims, accessible compensation and recovery arrangements, and a free and anonymous support hotline for children that may be operated via telephone but also by text messaging, internet messaging, discussion forums, email and face to-face meetings.
4. A national education program to raise awareness of CSEA that empowers children, young people, parents, guardians, caregivers and practitioners with information, space for children to offer ideas and influence the development of CSEA-related practices, and support systems for people with a sexual interest in children to prevent them from acting on their interest.
5. Procedures to enable the timely removal of child sexual abuse material when a company confirms its presence on its service and child safety considerations integrated into appropriate corporate policies, procedures and processes.
6. Ethical, informed and balanced media coverage of CSEA that is sensitive to the victims' dignity and rights and the use of universally-agreed terminology relating to CSEA to ensure that information is communicated rapidly and legibly amongst all stakeholders.

Ms. Rozga concluded by discussing the responsibilities of faith leaders and called on them to take concrete action to end the online sexual exploitation of children.

John Carr— Senior Expert Adviser for Online Child Safety for ECPAT International

Mr. John Carr has been with ECPAT since the 1990s and in 2001 he was the principal author of ECPAT International's submission on Child Pornography to the 2nd World Congress in Yokohama. Mr. Carr is a member of the Executive Board of the UK Council on Child Internet Safety and a member of Europol's Expert Platform and the UK's ICANN Public Safety Working group. He has advised many of the world's largest internet companies on online child safety.

Mr. Carr began by noting that children are possibly the largest identifiable constituency of internet users. The internet, he said, has provided children with the opportunity to assert their rights and independence, seek support, and receive a better education. But the internet also brings a multitude of problems that can put children in serious danger.

He went on to observe that as soon as internet access becomes widely available in a certain area, certain crimes, including the exploitation of children, increase. The scale of these offenses is greater than the capacity of law enforcement agencies. He noted that the



amount of child abuse images available in the world has grown. Before the internet, an arrest might result in the seizure of a handful of child abuse pictures. Not there are likely billions of photos being circulated globally. It is not possible, he claimed, for traditional policing to cope with numbers like these with the help of various other industries. He highlighted one helpful program created by Microsoft, called Photo DNA. The program allows law enforcement agencies to create a unique “digital fingerprint” of a child abuse image, and then are able to tell if similar images are new or a copy.

Mr. Carr concluded by noting that not all parts of the internet organizations are helping in the fight against online exploitation of children. He pointed out that ICANN allows the creation of domains that distribute child abuse materials, and should take measures to end this practice.

Reverend Que English— Religious Leader and Activist in the Bronx, NY

Rev. Que English is the co-founder of the Bronx Clergy Roundtable, a large faith-based coalition of nearly 500 members and partners. She is the co-founder of the New York City Clergy Roundtable, which works to address major citywide issues. She has also established several mentoring programs throughout the Bronx, including a Re-Entry and Youth Crime Prevention Training Program for faith-based leaders, and The Nest, an entrepreneurship program meant to empower the previously incarcerated. Rev. English is the Chair of the NYC Faith-Based Coalition against Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence.

Rev. English began her speech by praising the fact that this panel was not merely a conversation, but rather a call to concrete action and an invitation for religious communities specifically to end online sexual exploitation against children. The internet and social media have thrown open the door to exploitation on a whole new level, she said, and offenders are hard to spot. They often have normal names and use everyday social media outlets to lure the most vulnerable children. She spoke about how online exploitation victims can be abused in any location with an internet connection and a webcam or a mobile phone. This is why parents and faith leaders, she said, must make it their business to know what websites their children frequent, what pictures they take on their phones, and who they talk to online. She warned not to develop a callousness toward horrific abuse that some come to consider normal.

Rev. English next discussed action in faith communities. Social justice, she said, represents “the action taken when righteous anger and love collide, creating healing in our communities.” God requires us to not only to speak or write about justice for children,



she reminded, but also to do justice out of merciful love. She called upon the village of faith to rise to the occasion. She noted that faith plays a major role because victims, survivors, and perpetrators are in houses of worship.

She next talked about the founding of Not on My Watch! Safe Haven Network International. It was started because she realized it was going to take an international movement to address the international issue of sex trafficking and online sexual exploitation of children. This problem, she said, is universal and crosses all religious faiths, so it is important to assemble individuals and groups that represent all religious disciplines and collectively work to solve this problem. She noted the importance of collaborating with elected officials, public safety officers, service providers, and others.

She explained that to date, Not on My Watch has educated over 300 houses of worship representing 1,000s of individuals on how to become safe havens for victims and survivors. They have launched awareness campaigns in schools and elsewhere. By 2020, she said, they hope to educate 1,000 houses of worship.

She warned that it is through silence that evil prevails and reminded that this current work lays the foundation for a better future for generations to come. Many will not see, nor enjoy, the full benefits of their labor, but they will be at peace knowing that they did their part in making the world a better place for children. Rev. English ended with a call to action, encouraging faith communities to network with other houses of worship, develop relationships with the “movers and shakers” of their wider communities, continue to educate, and create awareness through any means possible. Start small, she said, and have faith that it will eventually expand.

Rabbi Diana Gerson— Program Director at the New York Board of Rabbis

Rabbi Diana Gerson, MAHL, has been successfully advancing the New York Board of Rabbis' leadership role in confronting family violence in the faith community since 2005. As an authority in the field, Rabbi Gerson has provided training to more than 3,000 members of the clergy and faith leaders around the United States. In October 2009, Rabbi Gerson founded a new organization, Love Squared, which focuses on building leadership in faith communities to support their members in fostering healthy relationships and marriages. She is a recipient of the Faith Leaders Award from Affinity Health Plan and was named one of the "21 Leaders for the 21st Century" by Women's eNews.

Rabbi Gerson began her remarks by recalling real-life examples of online exploitation of children in faith settings. She mentioned incidents involving exposure to



online pornography, explicit communication between adults and minors, and inappropriate recordings of children. She then quoted the statistic that 1 out of every 3 internet users in the world are children. When children are given access to the internet, she said, they are given access to the world, and at the same time the world access to them. She noted that prayer without action is never enough and faith leaders should not forget to utilize their moral authority and responsibility. All communities of faith, when mobilized, have the capacity to initiate great change.

Rabbi Gerson then spoke about how to best bring about this change. She called on all people of faith to help victims of online exploitation by using their “moral voice”, creating safe spaces for children, and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. She added that religious traditions should be taught “as a resource, and not as a roadblock.”

Finally she declared that all adults have a responsibility to prevent child abuse through education, protect through supervision, and react to reported cases in a way that protects victims and not perpetrators.

As was noted by Ms. Rozga, religious communities possess unique moral, social, and spiritual assets that enable them to help prevent and address online child sexual exploitation. They also have the legitimacy and the clout to speak publically about these issues. Faith leaders and communities must create safe, child-friendly places, raise awareness, report suspected abuse to relevant authorities, encourage inter-faith cooperation and action, and remain informed on the issues.

