

## **EPP Hearing on sexual abuse of children on the internet European Parliament, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2010**

### **Who are the victims and who are the delinquents?**

Statement Julia von Weiler

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Innocence in Danger is an international movement against child sexual abuse with a special focus on distribution of child abusive images via internet and the risk digital media pose to children and adolescents today. Founded 1999 by Homayra Sellier in Paris, Innocence in Danger today has offices in France, Switzerland, the United States, Morocco, Columbia and Germany. The German chapter took up its work in 2003.

From 2004 until 2007 Innocence Germany conducted a study on how child and adolescent victims of child-pornographic-exploitation are being cared for in Germany. In 2005 Innocence in Danger e.V. together with another NGO founded a nationwide infoline against child sexual abuse in Germany. Right now we are in the last year of running a prevention model scheme on internet with adolescents concerning internet safety which we will hopefully turn into a nationwide peer to peer education program beginning of next year.

Networking and raising public awareness is one of the main aims of Innocence in Danger Germany.

- Innocence in Danger e.V. is a member of eNACSO (European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online thematic network), author of the brochure "The right click".
- Innocence in Danger e.V. is also part of an EU research, funded by Safer Internet called ROBERT (Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training) along with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Save the Children Denmark and Italy, Stellic International, Edinburgh University, Linköping University and Tartu University. Aim of this research is to better understand victimization as well as delinquent behaviour in order to enhance prevention programs as well as intervention programs.

[www.innocenceindanger.de](http://www.innocenceindanger.de)

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- In Germany we are part of the alliance “White IT” run by the minister of interior of Lower Saxony as well as
- the “BundLänder AG” run by the federal ministry of family affairs.

When talking about victims and delinquents it is necessary to distinguish between different groups.

1. Victims who have been or who are being abused within their social surroundings and whose images are being distributed by means of digital media.
2. Victims who are groomed online and are later on abused offline.
3. Victims who are groomed online and abused online.
4. Delinquents who abuse children and distribute the abusive images online.
5. Delinquents who groom children online in order to abuse them offline.
6. Delinquents who groom children online in order to abuse them online.

Then there is another group that needs to be understood and addressed:

7. Adolescents who have sexual encounters, take pictures or make films and distribute them – thus producing self generated child abusive images. Some of these might be experimenting and not be aware of the consequences, some might be already on the road to abusive behaviour and need to be stopped and treated.

### **Number of images around:**

It is very difficult to get hard figures of abusive images spread. But to give you an idea here are figures of the Child Victim Identification Program run by NCMEC<sup>1</sup>: 1998 the Child Victim Identification Program accounted for 100.000 child sexual abusive images. By the beginning of 2009 this number had risen up to 23 Million images!

As of last year ChildBase<sup>2</sup> held 807,525 unique images. We have to take into consideration that "The demographics of child sexual abuse images remain an incomplete science since the majority of confirmed images are of prepubescent children. Those boys and girls with incomplete sexual maturation but who have started pubertal development constitute a potential significant number of victims who are not accounted for in this

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<sup>1</sup> Child Victim Identification Program (1998 run by Copine Project, since 2000 run by NCMEC (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

<sup>2</sup> Ceop (Child Exploitation Online Protection Unit) – personal information by Terry Jones

aspect of child abuse surveillance. The reasons for this discrepancy rest upon the fact that the majority of analysts who monitor images on the Internet feel most comfortable in determining that an image is consistent with a child, when there is no evidence of sexual maturation at all" (Cooper, 2009). This is important as our estimates of the number of images is at best a very conservative guess, and a guess which is likely to exclude anyone showing any sexual maturation.

### **Victims:**

When talking about abusive images we need to be clear what we are talking about: Sexual abuse of children and adolescents. We are talking about vaginal and anal penetration, oral abuse, touching, making children and adolescents do things they DO NOT want to do. And we need to be very much aware that abusive images make the utter shame, hurt and devastation of children and adolescents public.

As Dr. Sharon Cooper, a highly distinguished US expert puts it: "The distribution of child sex abuse images means there can be one victim and many offenders. The fact that these images are spread and downloaded by others leads to heightened symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, depression and or anxiety, plus a diagnosis so far not commonly seen in child sex abuse cases – paranoia."

But actually we do believe that we need to find a better name for it. Because these victims have every reason to be afraid that their images are seen by others, maybe people in their close surroundings.

And we need to understand that these images are around FOR EVER. As we all know, once an image is online it will most probably always be online. Meaning that victims have to find new ways of coping and we need to help them in doing so.

### **Delinquents:**

use the internet and digital media to distribute images of abused children. They also make use of the internet – chat rooms, social networks, etc. in order to contact children and groom them into abusing them (online and/or offline). Today digital media allow for online sexual abuse taking place without even laying a finger on the victim. Simply by manipulating them to get undressed, touch themselves and masturbate in front of a webcam. These images will either be spread or used to blackmail the child into 'harder' action or offline meetings where hands on offences will take place.

And we need to understand that these delinquents do NOT all suffer from paedophilia. Meaning that many offenders act because they can, because they seize the opportunity and because they like to impose (sexual) power over children and adolescents.

### **Adolescents:**

might use digital media to contact each other and to engage in cybersex. This might again result in spreading “abusive images,” blackmailing others and using the material for cybermobbing.

### **What needs to be done?**

Apart from the necessity of taking down images as well as access blocking (where take down is not done within a certain time frame) – on a global level – it is of uttermost importance in order to protect children and adolescents. The technological side is one part of the solution but NOT – in the least – the main part.

More steps are needed:

#### **1. Identifying all above mentioned types of online victims and providing them with adequate care.**

In order to do that we need to train counsellors and therapists maybe even by generating a European or International curriculum which then will be applied in the respective countries.

#### **2. Online counselling – as a first step to getting help is also needed.**

A study conducted by Catarina Katzer, University of Cologne showed that only 8% of those adolescents who have been sexually harassed online will turn to an adult for help. Online counselling will make this step much easier and might then lead them into “face to face” sessions. The German infoline N.I.N.A. will offer online counselling to online victims as of fall this year – funded by the World Childhood Foundation. Here it is detrimental to work with those social networks who clearly target children and adolescents as members.

#### **3. Treatment programs for delinquents**

It is necessary to provide adequate treatment programs for delinquents which will also address online grooming and online abuse of children. By doing so we will also learn more about their behaviour which in turn can be put to use for prevention as well as intervention programs for victims.

#### **4. Prevention**

We need adequate programs to reach out to children, adolescents, care takers and educators with prevention programs in order to make them understand risks as well as safety measures to be taken.

## **5. Research**

concerning online grooming leading to online or offline abuse as well as concerning the distribution of images. Only by doing so we will be able to understand mechanisms which in turn will be put to use for treatment of victims, treatment of delinquents and prevention programs. ROBERT is setting out to do a first step in exactly that direction.

Overall it is high time to join forces and efforts and take a step forward instead of having the “wheel reinvented” all over the place!

Thank you for your attention.

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