We Have The Technology To Stop Child Pornography

By Robert Ing, DSc, FAPSc, CPO

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Child Pornography is the photographing, filming, videotaping, artistic rendering or writing of explicit or implied sexual activity of children, the final product of these acts and the activity of distributing these items. On a worldwide basis, Child Pornography generated approximately US$3 billion in 2004 (CDN$4 billion, GBP 2 billion). While Child Pornography has existed throughout history, the introduction of technology such as the Internet, digital image technology and storage has fostered the exponential growth of this crime. There are paedophiles and organized child sex rings that thrive off of, and propagate this crime without regard or remorse for their victims. The typical age range of their victims is from 3 to 12 years of age. The act of Child Pornography sees the innocent trust of an unknowing child betrayed, a child coerced or tricked into an abusive situation, or a child threatened with violence in order to perform. The scars left on a child from these acts will last a lifetime.

Five percent of all adult Internet traffic contains some form of Child Pornography while three percent of adult websites offer access to illegal Child Pornography. Each day approximately 75 million e-mails worldwide contain some form of Child Pornography and each month approximately 45 million files are downloaded or shared worldwide.

Today, the major challenge for law enforcement in stopping Child Pornography and Child Pornographers lies in the ability to identify the perpetrators and distribution of this material. Given the limited resources available, law enforcement has been able to make some gains in reducing Child Pornography. The trend by most governments is to legislate Internet Service Providers into filtering content so that Child Pornography doesn't reach subscribers computers and report subscribers that may be suspect. Furthermore, sentencing of Child Pornographers is seldom in tune with the crime and its impact on society. Most white collar crimes will carry stiffer penalties than a crime of child pornography. While this shields the public and restricts access and distribution for low level pornographers it does very little to apprehend those directly involved at the source of manipulating the world's children.

However, the major governments of the world have the technology in place to shut down 60% to 70% of Child Pornography on the Internet and identify those responsible. The problem lies in political will and receiving the mandate to do so.

In 1971 a system known as ECHELON was established by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The purpose of ECHELON was and still is today, to monitor and intercept global communications for the purpose of national security interests between the five countries. Using supercomputers and skilled intelligence analysts, the system monitors 3 billion communications daily including telephone calls, e-mail messages, Internet downloads, satellite transmissions, video transmissions and several other communications modalities. Regardless of whether the communication is sent by radio waves, cable, fibre or infrared; ECHELON has the capability to "listen in". The system monitors all of the world's communications indiscriminately and then filters out or selects specific transmissions based on keyword phrases, digital signatures, digital image values and other preprogrammed criteria using a combination of artificial intelligence, fuzzy logic and the power of supercomputers.

It is not surprising that ECHELON routinely monitors 90% of all of the world's Internet traffic. With this capability alone, ECHELON could intercept and identify 67 million e-mails containing Child Pornography on a daily basis and track these back to the originator and recipient. This action alone, if properly followed up would lock down the Internet and lock out 60% of the distribution of Child Pornography world wide, leading to the arrest of those involved. ECHELON is the largest signals intelligence (SIGINT) system in the world. In addition, there are smaller, national systems of similar capability operated in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, Russia, China, Germany, Israel, France and India.

In a perfect world, ECHELON and these smaller national SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) systems would be utilized to aid law enforcement in the war on Child Pornography. But sadly, this is not the case. The United States government refuses to officially, publicly acknowledge that ECHELON exists while the other four countries involved in the system have accepted the fact that the majority of their citizens know about the system in general terms but are not forthcoming on any other information regarding these systems that their citizens pay for via their taxes.

As of 20 June 2005 I had assembled a petition consisting of well over 5 million signatories from around the globe that reflected my efforts of a full year of lobbying and mobilizing the world's Internet community in an effort to use this untapped resource to save the world's children from being victims of Child Pornography.

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While some may balk at this mere 5 million, it has been quite an accomplishment considering that despite my own personal activities in the North American mainstream broadcast media, this initiative received virtually no promotion or mention in the North American broadcast or print media. Sadly, it simply was not newsworthy enough. This petition was digitally presented on this same date to the five sovereign signatories involved in ECHELON to urge them to use this system in the identification of Child Pornography and as an aid to local law enforcement in the apprehension of Child Pornographers. It is my sincerest hope, that this initiative, dubbed "The Ing Initiative" may be given consideration by the world's governments.

I began this initiative because I believed and still believe that it is better to take a stand on an issue rather than leave it alone because it may not be popular, politically correct or that someone else or government should take care of it. I hope that you will consider joining me.

Whether you have participated in my petition or are just learning about this initiative, it is still not too late. Please write your local federal government representative and tell him or her how you feel about Child Pornography.

We have the technology to stop Child Pornography. Let's use it!

About the Author

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