

HRC22 Side Event on Child Sex Tourism

Presentation by Australian Deputy Permanent Representative Nicholas Purtell

Child exploitation remains a devastating and widespread form of criminal activity and Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this discussion to share our experience in combating child sex tourism.

From the Australian perspective, we see three elements as critical to addressing this repulsive industry: strong domestic action, effective cooperation (with other countries, the private sector and civil society) and the eradication of child poverty.

Domestic action

It is of the utmost importance that members of the global community do all they can domestically to deter potential offenders.

Australia has an extensive framework in place to prevent, investigate and prosecute all forms of child sexual exploitation, including offences that occur within Australia and those committed by Australians overseas.

This framework was strengthened in April 2010, following the passage of a number of reforms to Australia's child sexual exploitation laws. Amongst other things, the reforms introduced new laws making it an offence for a person to prepare or plan to commit a child sex tourism offence. Actions covered by this offence include collecting information about the child sex tourism industry in a particular location, making contact with child sex tour operators and booking flights and accommodation.

Importantly, criminalising the act of preparation prevents contact with a child being made.

And we maintain a national database which enables our law enforcement agencies to monitor the whereabouts of persons convicted of sexual or other serious offences against children once they are released back into the community.

These domestic measures are reinforced by education initiatives to raise awareness about the problem of child sex tourism and what people should do if they become aware of suspicious behaviour. These have included: advertising campaigns; fact sheets; and the display of signage in airports alerting travellers to the new laws. As well as the provision of advice to travellers through the Government's traveller and consular assistance service.

Regional Cooperation

While domestic action, including extraterritorial legislation, is an important component, cooperation with countries targeted by child sex tourism operators is essential. Not only to assist the investigation and prosecution of illegal activities but also to work in partnership to reduce the conditions which make children vulnerable to these crimes.

Cooperation with these ‘targeted’ countries is invaluable and Australia recognises the importance of strengthening regional cooperation to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) continues to build and maintain relationships with foreign law enforcement agencies and NGOs in our region by exchanging information. The Australian Aid Program, AusAID, continues a successful longstanding program with ASEAN countries to combat trafficking in persons. Project Childhood, a \$7.5 million program (2010 – 2014) builds on over ten years of Australian Government efforts to combat child sexual exploitation in tourism in South East Asia. Partner countries are Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. The project helps to protect at-risk children through training local law enforcement agencies, with the aim of increasing arrests and prosecutions. It also helps to prevent children becoming victims by increasing awareness within vulnerable communities, government and tourism companies, through public campaigns, training, and telephone reporting hot lines.

Cooperation with the private sector

Not only must all countries work together to combat child sex tourism, but there is an increasing need to collaborate with the private sector to assist in meeting its legal and moral responsibilities to protect children. The in-country expertise of many NGOs is also a valuable resource which should be drawn upon.

Initiatives such as the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT) – an international collaboration of law enforcement agencies, NGOs and private sector partners – are representative of the sort of positive partnerships that can assist in building a comprehensive global capacity to prevent crimes against children.

Private sector collaboration is also being supported by AusAID’s Project Childhood, which seeks to bring greater awareness to the tourism industry about the crime of child sex tourism, and importantly, equips the tourism industry with strategies to help better protect vulnerable children from this crime.

The Australian Federal Police also engage with civil society by organising events, such as the Child Sex Tourism Symposium, which it held with NGOs and law enforcement agencies from the four Mekong countries, Indonesia and the Philippines in 2012. Increasing dialogue between all partners serves the interests of all actors committed to the cause.

Addressing poverty

Poverty is a critical factor in the exploitation of children globally. The global community must continue in its progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals to assist children in escaping poverty and by doing so, help reduce the likelihood of them becoming victims of child sex tourism and other forms of exploitation.

Accordingly, a key objective of Australia’s aid program is to provide opportunities for all children to receive a better education so they have the skills to build their own

futures, and, in time, escape poverty. By 2015, Australia expects to be investing around 25 per cent of the annual aid budget in education.

In addition every individual or organisation that works with children under the Australian aid program has an obligation to protect children from exploitation and abuse as articulated in AusAID's Child Protection Policy.

Concluding Remarks

Australia is proud that its efforts have been recognised. Our laws send a strong message to Australians who travel overseas for the purpose of sexually exploiting children that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

Nevertheless, we understand that there is still more that we – as a member of the global community – can do.

Australia has shown a strong commitment to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the reduction of poverty, particularly amongst vulnerable children, and we encourage all countries to do the same.

Mrs Chairperson, distinguished members of the panel. Australia remains committed to the fight against child sex tourism, and will continue to play its part in putting an end to this exploitative industry.