IJM addresses UN Conference on Online Child Exploitation in Southeast Asia: Global Collaboration Advancing the Fight Against Cybersex Trafficking

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The fight against cybersex trafficking in the Asia-Pacific region is gaining visibility and momentum as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Regional Conference on Effective Responses to Online Child Sexual Exploitation meets in Bangkok this week.

Today, Kimberly Randle, Director of Corporate and Legal, International Justice Mission (IJM) Australia and David V. Ruggiero of IJM Philippines participated in the panel, "Proactive NGOs providing support for victims and identifying perpetrators – walking a thin line". Ms Randle outlined IJM Australia's demand-side advocacy efforts, highlighting the importance of collaboration. Such collaboration has resulted in the inclusion of cybersex trafficking in the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Crimes Against Children and Community Protection Measures) Bill 2017.

The proposed amendments are a result of the Report of the Commonwealth Joint Committee on Law Enforcement's Inquiry into Human Trafficking, to which IJM made submissions relating to cybersex trafficking.

Thanks to cooperation and support between Members of Parliament and senators across various parties, the Bill was introduced to federal parliament on 13 September and tabled yesterday.

The provisions, if passed, will "ensure that Australian paedophiles can no longer live stream child sexual abuse online behind a curtain of anonymity," Ms Randle told the conference.

Australia is well represented at the conference, reflecting the country's key role in tackling cybersex trafficking in the region. Sonya Ryan of the Carly Ryan Foundation was the keynote speaker and Detective Inspector Jon Rouse of Taskforce ARGOS, Queensland Police Service, also presented on the first day of the conference.

"Across our region concern over the growth of cybersex trafficking is leading to dialogue and collaboration at both national and international levels. Cybersex trafficking is a complex transnational issue, and the combined efforts of government, law enforcement and civil society will be more important than ever," said Ms Randle.

Public awareness and engagement is crucial to a whole of community approach to shutting down the online sexual exploitation of children. In response to the introduction of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Crimes Against Children and Community Protection Measures) Bill 2017, IJM has launched the campaign, #PowerOfThankYou which will culminate with the presentation of a large Thank You card to Parliament following the Bill's passage. Australians are encouraged to sign and share the campaign, showing their desire to end cybersex trafficking and appreciation for the leadership within Parliament on this matter: https://ijm.org.au/thank-you-card.

Ms Randle is available for comment from 2.15pm AEST today.

IJM has offices in Cebu and Manila, with investigators, lawyers and social workers who partner with local police and authorities to rescue and restore victims, prosecute perpetrators and strengthen the capacity of the public justice system to protect children from online sexual exploitation. This abuse, commonly known as cybersex trafficking, is escalating at alarming rates, with the AFP reporting 11,000 referrals in 2015.

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