



Press Release

Partners in Namibia join forces to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse

18 May 2016, Windhoek - The Government of the Republic of Namibia in collaboration with UNICEF and partners in the information and communication technologies (ICT) industry and civil society are meeting in Windhoek for a two day national conference on **Child Online Protection; Addressing and Tackling Exploitation and Abuse of Children**.

The first ever National Conference on Child Online Protection will increase awareness and mobilise partnerships to safeguard children from online risks including abuse and sexual exploitation, following increased digital engagement of children due to the availability and usage of online devices such as internet and mobile phones. Building the resilience of children to enjoy the internet in safety and to manage such risks is therefore critical to combat online child sexual exploitation.

“The internet has significantly altered the scope, trends and forms of violence against children,” said Deputy Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Hon. Lucia Witbooi. “There is therefore a great urgency for collective thinking on child protection as we must adopt and develop ways to address these new forms of violation of children rights.”

Through the digital world, children’s ideas and worldview have increasingly been altered, as they become connected to new experiences and opportunities, and also new threats including cyber bullying, child online sexual abuse and online stalking leading to offline violence, committed both by adults and children themselves.

A recent study on knowledge, attitudes, and practices of ICT use and online protection risks by adolescents (between 13 and 17 years of age) in Namibia, revealed that about 93% of adolescents surveyed have access to use of the internet or a mobile phone. The same study indicated widespread and unsolicited exposure to online sexual content, with 68% of respondents having been exposed to such material against their wish.

“Despite the positive difference that online connectivity has brought to how children and young people communicate, learn and express opinions, we are also attentive to the extensive abuse which can result if this space is not kept safe,” said Inspector-General of the Namibian Police, Lieutenant-General Sebastian Haitota Ndeitunga.

Over the next two days, participants, who also include regional and international experts, will begin to formulate a national response framework to promote responsible digital citizenship, learning and online safety of and by children. Industry players are also being engaged to step up measures to remove abusive content, assist in police investigations and build into their devices protective software to prevent access to abusive content.

“The conference is an important milestone binding national and universal commitment by different stakeholders, to ensure the protection, provision of rights and participation of children in the digital age,” said UNICEF Representative, Ms. Micaela Marques de Sousa.



British
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Windhoek

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children Online

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This conference is being held as part of the global **#WE PROTECT** initiative in which the United Kingdom Government has committed financial and technical support to 17 countries to end violence against children. This initiative promotes the creation of partnerships which collectively speak out on ending abuse of children as well supporting policies and legislature to identify and outlaw any form of violence against children.

“A global response to tackle the proliferation of child sexual abuse material is urgently required in order to make it more difficult and a deterrent for criminals to exploit the digital age and abuse children for sexual purposes,” said the British High Commissioner in Namibia, H.E. Joanne Lomas.

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