

To the Honourable President and members of the Senate in Parliament assembled:

The petition of the undersigned shows:

That material banned through the 'Refused Classification' category in Australia includes child pornography, material that promotes rape, sex with animals or incest and material that instructs in how to carry out bombings and torture. We note this ban extends to books, magazines, films, television and Australian hosted websites and generally works well to prohibit access to material the vast majority of Australians would find abhorrent.

We also note that there are many overseas hosted websites that promote such material for sale, including material that has involved the trafficking and sexual abuse of women and children. We further note that the UN Human Rights Council passed resolution A/HRC/8/L.17 of 12 June 2008 calling for governments to take steps:

combat the use of the Internet to facilitate trafficking in persons and crimes related to sexual or other forms of exploitation and to strengthen international cooperation to investigate and prosecute trafficking facilitated by the use of the Internet.

Your petitioners ask that the Senate:

Pass legislation that requires Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block all websites that contain material classified as 'Refused Classification', regardless of where such sites are hosted.

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Return to the Justice and International Mission Unit, Uniting Church Centre, 130 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000 by Friday 24 February 2012.

Reasons to support Internet Blocking of Sexual Abuse

The Federal Government has moved to require Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to have to block material that would be classified as Refused Classification (RC) under the Australian classification system. Material that is classified as RC is already banned on Australian hosted websites.

The RC classification category is defined as materials that:

- (a) describe, depict, express or otherwise deal with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards or morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified;
- (b) describe or depict in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 (whether the person is engaged in sexual activity or not); or
- (c) promote, incite or instruct in matters of crime or violence.

The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates the commercial child sexual abuse industry on-line, as opposed to non-commercial peer-to-peer networks, generates an estimated 50,000 new child sexual abuse images each year and is worth about US\$250 million globally. Each one of these images involves the abuse of a child, many of these child victims fit the definition of being victims of human trafficking. Commercial child sexual abuse sites are more likely to involve the abuse of very young children, with the Internet Watch Foundation noting that 69% of victims appearing to be younger than 10 and 24% being less than 7 years of age.

The UNODC report suggests that law enforcement efforts may be catching as little as 1% of all consumers of child sexual abuse materials.

Research has indicated that the ready access to child sexual abuse material online has created an impression for offenders that this is a common practice and so reduces inhibitions to abuse.

Blocking access to commercial child sexual abuse sites will assist in deterring those who are curious and do not have high internet skills. Research on those who purchase commercial child sexual abuse material online has found this is a behaviour that escalates if not challenged. Blocking disrupts the ability of commercial child sexual abuse businesses to market themselves and provide a smooth service to their customers. It is recommended by INTERPOL as assisting in combating this criminal activity.

INTERPOL argue the “primary goal of blocking access to child sexual abuse material is to protect the rights of the children being depicted.” They summarise the advantages of access blocking as:

The system prevents crimes from being committed, limits the number of criminals having to be investigated in cases related to commercial child sexual abuse material web pages and protects victims. By preventing crime and thereby reducing the amount of work for the police, more resources can be put into investigations and subsequent court proceedings.

It does not replace the need for the education of Australian children and parents about cyber-safety, but is a measure that Australia can take for the tens of thousands of victims of child sexual abuse overseas every year whose images are sold to consumers in Australia online.

