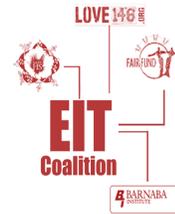


Human Trafficking and the Internet: End Internet Trafficking Coalition



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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San Francisco, CA- July 7, 2010 The Internet is clearly a part of everyday life in the United States. According to Pingdom, ¹some estimates of how pervasive the Internet has become a part of the 21st century reality include:

- **234 million** – The number of websites as of December 2009.
- **1.4 billion** – The number of email users worldwide.
- **1.73 billion** – Internet users worldwide (September 2009).
- **252,908,000** – Internet users in North America.
- **27.3 million** – Number of tweets on Twitter per day (November, 2009)
- **350 million** – People on Facebook.
- **1 billion** – The total number of videos YouTube serves in one day.

While the numbers are simply numbers, what does the increasing prevalence of the web, social media, and even smart phones mean for the anti-trafficking movement in 2010 and onward? The End Internet Trafficking Coalition (EITC) seeks to address these questions and educate the public about the relationship between victim exploitation and the Internet.

We can no longer ignore that the Internet, social media and smart phones are normalized in everyday life, just as we cannot ignore the use of such sites and services for exploitation: from pornography, prostitution, human trafficking, stalking, and bullying, to websites that encourage language and postings that are degrading to people where their only value is illustrated through their sexual commoditization.

A recent report shows how sexual harassment, cyber bullying, and sexual solicitation are common occurrences on the Internet for minors.² In the work that EITC does as a collaborative effort in conjunction with other service providers, we have seen the Internet used to recruit minors in trafficking for the purposes of prostituting them; the Internet used to sell and purchase minors; the distribution of pornography of minors; and “sexting,”³ a recent phenomenon in which 20% of teens participate in sending or distributing nude or sexually explicit pictures of themselves or other teens. What begins as an adventure for some teens in the world of “sexting,” will turn into a nightmare for others. Their information and images can end up on porn sites, social networking sites, and other sex service sites for public consumption.

As part of an effort to raise awareness, the Rebecca Project published in the San Francisco Chronicle a letter to Craig from “Survivors of Craigslist Sex Trafficking”:

¹ “Internet 2009 in numbers.” *Pingdom*. January 22, 2010. <http://royal.pingdom.com/2010/01/22/internet-2009-in-numbers/>

² Samantha Biegler and Dana Boyd. “Risky Behaviors and Online Safety: A 2010 Literature Review.” Harvard University, Berkman Center for Internet & Safety. 2010

³ “Sexting” Shockingly Common Among Teens. *CBS News*. Jan. 15, 2009. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/15/national/main4723161.shtml>

“Craig, I am AK. In 2009, I met a man twice my age who pretended to be my boyfriend, and my life as an average girl -- looking forward to college, doing my chores, and hanging out with my friends -- ended. This "boyfriend" soon revealed he was a pimp. He put my picture on Craigslist, and I was sold for sex by the hour at truck stops and cheap motels, 10 hours with 10 different men every night.⁴

Stories such as "AK's" have prompted some Internet-based and software companies to make the Internet more safe. And, the investigation of criminal activity has led to specific units developed for human trafficking and Internet violence, on both local and federal levels. Even Craigslist is working to donate money towards agencies that provide services. While some are rejecting such offers (recently The Advocates for Human Rights received a check for \$25,000 from the Craigslist Charitable Fund of San Francisco and declined it⁵), others are petitioning, including one with recommendations to Craigslist.⁶

On May 10, 2010, San Francisco Police Department conveyed collaboration with Craigslist to investigate online human trafficking cases.⁷ Others, such as The Coalition Against the Trafficking of Women (CATW) and their partners, are taking their efforts to the front steps of agencies like Craigslist. This protest will occur on July 8, 2010 at the Craigslist Headquarters in San Francisco. But questions remain: “What now?” and “Are ‘Craigslist’ and its community listening?”

EITC is addressing these questions and we would like to offer general recommendations to the broader web-based community that connects us as an anti-trafficking movement:

For Web-Based Companies

- 1) Web-Based Agencies that have broader purposes for Internet use other than sex exploitation, but by the very nature of the Internet have become conduits for human trafficking, must collaborate with law enforcement and direct service providers to combat human trafficking.
- 2) Web-Based Agencies need to take the steps to make their services safe for the community because if we are going to protect “free speech,” then what about the voice of those who are exploited by web services, but because of trauma do not speak out?

For the Community

- 1) In lobbying and public protest efforts, let’s not just tackle Craigslist, but include other companies such as Google, YouTube, Facebook and other companies with forums similar to an “Erotic” section. Especially sites that allow a person to access exploitive images by merely clicking that s/he is 18 years or older. If we are going to take action against Internet violence, let’s broaden the scope to make sure that all web-based companies are being held accountable.
- 2) Educate your community and pressure your local government and federal government to take actions to eliminate the harms that occur on web sites, where their sole purpose is violence against people, especially women and minors. By the very nature of the sex industry, human trafficking can be found on such sites.
- 3) Collaborate and discuss: how do we prevent violence and eliminate harm without eliminating the tools that are sites of empowerment and keep us connected?

To learn more, join the End Internet Trafficking Coalition in fighting exploitation via the web: www.eitcoalition.org.

⁴ “Craig, Please Listen to Us.” Rebecca Project for Human Rights. May 19, 2010.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/malika-saada-saar/craig-please-listen-to-us_b_582237.html

⁵ Sharon Schmickle. “Advocates for Human Rights declines donation from Craigslist Fund over sex ads.” Wednesday, May 5, 2010

⁶

http://humantrafficking.change.org/petitions/view/tell_craigslist_to_make_real_change_in_the_adult_services_section_of_craigslist

⁷ North Bay Human Trafficking Task Force.

