

PRESS RELEASE

The Hague, November 4, 2013

---

*Tens of thousands of child victims in international online sex crimes case disclosed by Terre des Hommes*

*Over 1,000 adults from more than 65 countries identified in international online sex crimes case involving young children*

**Terre des Hommes Netherlands raises the alarm about a largely unknown, but quickly spreading new form of child exploitation that has tens of thousands victims involved in the Philippines alone: webcam child sex tourism. In less than two and a half months Terre des Hommes researchers were able to identify over 1,000 adults who were willing to pay children in developing countries to perform sexual acts in front of the webcam. With the help of a virtual 10-year-old Filipino girl, named Sweetie, the researchers identified adults from more than 65 countries. The video footage of the child predators has been handed over to the police authorities today.**

To show how unrestrained child predators can act but also to show how easy it is to track them down the Dutch child rights organisation put itself in the shoes of a 10-year-old Filipino girl. With an innovative technology the virtual character Sweetie was created to be controlled by Terre des Hommes researchers. From a remote building in Amsterdam the researchers operated in public chat rooms. In a very short period, over 20,000 predators from around the world approached the virtual 10-year-old, asking for webcam sex performances. While the adults interacted with the virtual girl, the researchers gathered information about them through social media to uncover their identities. With this evidence Terre des Hommes Netherlands is pushing all governments to adopt proactive investigation policies, with a world wide petition, starting today.

**Proactive patrolling of public Internet hotspots**

Despite the fact that webcam child sex tourism is banned by most national and international laws, only 6 perpetrators worldwide have been convicted of this crime. "It is not a problem of existing laws", says Hans Guyt, director of campaigns at Terre des Hommes Netherlands. "The United Nations has established laws that make this child abuse nearly universally illegal. The biggest problem is that the police don't take action until child victims file reports, but children almost never report these crimes. These children are usually forced to do this by adults or by extreme poverty. Sometimes they have to testify against their own family, which is almost an impossible thing to do for a child", explains Guyt. "We want governments to adopt proactive investigation policies that give law enforcement agencies the mandate to actively patrol public Internet hotspots where this child abuse is taking place every day. The child predators doing this now feel that the law doesn't apply to them. The Internet is free, but not lawless."

**750,000 child predators active online at any given moment**

Additional studies of Terre des Hommes show that webcam child sex tourism is as devastating to the victims as physical abuse. The children involved suffer from low self-esteem and low feelings of self worth. Furthermore, they show symptoms of post-traumatic stress. They often feel ashamed and guilty about the things they do and they exhibit self-destructive behaviour, like using alcohol or drugs to relax and escape from their problems. Meanwhile, the number of children exploited through webcam child sex tourism is expected to rise, as it firstly meets the massive global demand of predators. Secondly, growing access to cheap Internet in developing countries is making it easier to exploit children this way. At any given moment, there are 750,000 child predators connected to the Internet, according to the United Nations and the FBI.

Together with Avaaz.org, Terre des Hommes the Netherlands has created an online petition to pressure governments to adopt proactive investigation policies in order to protect children against webcam child sex tourism. The petition starts today and can be signed through Avaaz or via [youtube.com/sweetie](https://youtube.com/sweetie).

The process of identifying predators for this project is explained in a short documentary that can be viewed at [youtube.com/sweetie](https://youtube.com/sweetie).

**Terre des Hommes Netherlands** stops children from being exploited, removes children from exploitative situations and ensures that these children are able to develop in a safe environment. We closely work together with local project partners in 17 countries across four regions in South-East Asia, South Asia, East Africa and South America. The head office is in The Hague.

Terre des Hommes Netherlands is a member of the Terre des Hommes International Federation (TDHIF) which has a coordinating role between the member organisations who all operate independently under the name Terre des Hommes.

---

**END OF PRESS RELEASE**

*The petition, short documentary, research reports and imagery are available at [youtube.com/sweetie](https://youtube.com/sweetie). The software behind Sweetie and the investigation toolkit that explains the succesful methodology to identify predators are shared with authorities only.*

On [youtube.com/sweetie](https://youtube.com/sweetie) you will find:

- The petition
- A short documentary
- FAQ in 8 different languages
- Investigation report: *Webcam Child Sex Tourism – a novel approach by Terre des Hommes*
- Investigation report: *Fullscreen on View – a report on the scale and magnitude of webcam child sex tourism*
- Campaign visuals and photo material of Sweetie, a chat room conversation, the research room

On request:

- The relevant number (per country) of identified predators by Terre des Hommes research
- High res video footage of the documentary

For further requires, please contact our press team:

[press@tdh.nl](mailto:press@tdh.nl)

+ 31 6 53 33 95 84

*Privacy statement*

This initiative is based on the desire to protect children, but it was also created on a foundation of respect for individual privacy. Terre des Hommes Netherlands believes that Internet should remain a free space for expression and that the sphere of personal privacy must be respected. Therefore, the investigation with Sweetie was conducted exclusively in public chat rooms and the identifying information on predators was collected using publicly available records and data provided by the adults themselves. The identities of more than a 1000 men will not be made public.