Terre des Hommes welcomes first conviction for contact with Sweetie

An Australian man was sentenced yesterday, Tuesday October 21, to one year in prison for initiating and maintaining indecent chat conversations with Sweetie, the virtual minor girl developed by children's rights organization Terre des Hommes in 2013 to denounce the rapidly growing threat of Webcam Child Sex Tourism. "This is a major breakthrough in the fight against this form of child exploitation," said Hans Guijt, Terre des Hommes, project leader of the Sweetie campaign.

During ten weeks in 2013 a team of Terre des Hommes researchers frequented dozens of chat rooms under the profile of minor children, including that of a nine-year-old Filipino girl named Sweetie. Tens of thousands of men sought contact with her, most of them with sexual intentions. The team was able to identify by name and personal details one thousand people from 72 countries.

Conviction
This information and the chat logs were transferred to Europol which then shared this information with police authorities in the countries concerned. This led to a number of arrests, including that of a man from Brisbane, Australia. The judge convicted this man on three charges, including "using a carriage service to transmit indecent communications to a child under 16". According to the judge it did not matter that in reality it was a virtual child, according to the verdict: "If you believe that's a 9 year old girl, then that's the law, that's good enough".

Breakthrough
The conviction is a breakthrough in the fight against Webcam Child Sex Tourism, a form of child abuse via webcam, said Hans Guijt of Terre des Hommes, project leader of the Sweetie campaign:

"We wanted to show that it is very easy to fight this form of child exploitation. But in order to do so, authorities must start deploying proactive investigation methods. They can not wait for the victims to file a report, as is usual for sex crimes, because these victims do not file report. Thus, the perpetrators go about their business unpunished. With Sweetie, we have shown that it is relatively easy to detect, identify, arrest and bring these offenders to justice."

Child Pornography
The convicted man has been convicted several times for child abuse since 1997 and had
pleaded guilty to all three charges: sending obscene photos to Sweetie, possession of child pornography and violating restrictions imposed by previous convictions. He was sentenced, in total, to two years imprisonment and twelve months of intensive corrective guidance. The man will also follow a sexual offenders treatment programme.

**Fast growing problem**

Webcam Child Sex Tourism is a fast growing and serious form of child abuse. It involves adults paying to see children perform sexual acts, alone, with other children, or with adults, for example in countries like the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia. Traditional police methods do not tackle this exploitation. Terre des Hommes developed the Sweetie project to demonstrate the extent and seriousness of the problem and to show that another, proactive investigation method can be efficient in the fight against this phenomenon.

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More information and interviews
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For reports on Webcam Child Sex Tourism and the Sweetie movie:
www.youtube.com/user/sweetie

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**Terre des Hommes stops child exploitation in developing countries. With projects in the fields of education, health care and microcredit we give underprivileged children chances again.**