Press release

The Hague, January 26, 2015

Sweetie 2.0: chat robots to trace online child sex abusers

Dutch Postcode Lottery funds Terre des Hommes project to combat online sexual exploitation of children

The Dutch children’s rights organization Terre des Hommes in close co-operation with international specialists will develop advanced software to tackle online sexual abuse of children world wide. The Dutch Postcode Lottery has agreed to donate 3.8 million Euro for this project. This was announced Monday January 26 at the annual Good Money Gala of the Dutch Lottery which is linked to the People's Postcode Lottery in the UK.

Thousands of children are victims of online sexual abuse. According to official estimates, at any given moment, there are more than 750,000 predators on the internet looking for sex with children in over 40,000 public chat rooms. In 2013, using the virtual character 'Sweetie', Terre des Hommes unmasked more than 1,000 men who were looking for webcam sex with children. Their details were handed over to the police authorities. With the Sweetie Project Terre des Hommes highlighted the scale and nature of this relatively new phenomenon and demonstrated that a proactive approach is most effective in preventing these crimes.

However, millions of potential offenders still consider themselves unobserved, anonymous and immune for prosecution. It is too easy to engage children in sexual activities on the internet. With the Sweetie 2.0 project Terre des Hommes aims to take on this crime. With the assistance of national and international experts, the organization is developing new, globally applicable software to combat webcam sex with children. This programme will monitor, trace, identify and deter millions of perpetrators looking for online sex with minors. The system will be tuned to national and international legal frameworks for investigation and prosecution. An extensive academic research programme into the impact of this approach is an integral part of the project.

“Tracking, identifying and warning potential predators is technically feasible, practically achievable and urgently required to deal with this rapidly growing phenomenon in an effective and efficient manner,” says project manager Hans Guijt of Terre des Hommes.
With this project and the support from the Dutch Post Code Lottery, Terre des Hommes and partners will be able to protect hundreds of thousands of children from this particularly insidious form of sexual exploitation.

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For more information and interviews:

Hans Guijt, project manager, phone +31/6/20499296 or +31/70/310 5020
Paul Wolters, interim press officer, phone +31/70/310 5000 of +31/6/2331 1817

Terre des Hommes Netherlands prevents child exploitation, removes children from exploitative situations and ensures these children can develop themselves in a safe environment.