



GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA



National Webinar on  
"Implementation of Strategic Policies to Protect Children  
from Online Sexual Abuse"

13 May 2020

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*Organized by*  
The Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights  
*and*  
International Justice Mission

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*In the august presence of*  
Hon. Minister Adv. Yashomati Thakur,  
Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra

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Mr. Guillermo  
Galarza,  
Director, Law  
Enforcement Training  
& Technology,  
International Centre  
for Missing &  
Exploited Children



Mr. Manoj  
Abraham,  
IPS, ADGP(HQ) &  
Nodal Officer, Kerala  
Police Cyberdome



Mr. Satya Yadav,  
Head,  
Trust & Safety,  
Facebook India



Dr. Harish Shetty,  
Child Psychiatrist,  
Mumbai



Mr. Krishna Sastry  
Pendyala,  
Executive Director,  
PwC India

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**NATIONAL WEBINAR ON  
'IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC  
POLICIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM  
ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE'**

**A REPORT**

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**13 May 2020**

## Introduction

The Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR) and International Justice Mission (IJM) organized a national webinar on *'Implementation of Strategic Policies to Protect Children from Online Sexual Abuse'* on 13 May 2020 to discuss and deliberate on the following issues:

- The emerging trends and technologies used by predators and paedophiles for online sexual exploitation of children;
- The role of Intermediaries (i.e. social networking sites) in curbing online sexual abuse;
- Existing regional and international best practices on cybersecurity;
- Legal framework to combat the issue of online sexual abuse;
- Initiatives taken at the state level to have a robust redressal mechanism;
- Standardization of current models of intervention and prevention policies; and
- Ramifications of online sexual abuse on the mental health of the child.

The webinar was attended by over 300 participants from officers of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Government of Maharashtra, members of State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights, members of State Women Commissions, members of State Human Rights Commissions, representatives from law enforcement agencies, policymakers, members of the judiciary, academicians and civil society organizations. Participation from these varied fields ensured that the discussion was looked at from a macro-level, therefore, taking into consideration all issues relating to the heinous crime of online sexual exploitation of children.

## Welcome and Inaugural Address

The webinar was moderated by **Mr. Mathew Joji**, Head, Strategic Communications and Development, International Justice Mission, who set the tone for the evening by welcoming the distinguished guests, speakers, and participants to the national webinar. He then laid out the objectives of the webinar, which was to devise policies through coordinated and cohesive legislative action to further help strengthen the government's efforts in combating online child sexual abuse, especially post the COVID-19 lockdown period.

The Inaugural Address was given by **Ms. Melissa Walavalkar**, Director of Operations, International Justice Mission, Mumbai who stressed on the importance to chalk out a well-defined plan for the post-lockdown world. She said, *"The organization is at the forefront to provide justice to the most vulnerable, and we will do everything in our capacity to support*

*the government to bring about a collective change*". She stressed on the need to create a safe online environment for children both during the lockdown period and after it, while realistically bringing to light the complexities surrounding this crime.

She mentioned that we need to utilize the national webinar to focus on a holistic approach with a diverse nuance to address this issue of online sexual exploitation of children post the COVID-19 scenario.

A welcome address was given by **Ms. Seema Vyas, IAS**, Member Secretary, Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, who stressed on the need for public awareness. She said, *"Webinars such as this are an excellent forum for us to spread awareness and take collective actions against such a heinous crime."* She stressed on total cooperation and collaboration across departments, jurisdictions, states, and nations to combat this crime.

### **Keynote Address by Hon. Minister Adv. Yashomati Thakur, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra**

The national webinar was graced by the presence of **Hon. Minister Adv. Yashomati Thakur**, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra. She stated that, *"Online sexual abuse is an intense topic which requires all of us to work together to create a safe space for children. We need to ensure that the Rule of Law is applied in the online world. The Ministry is at the forefront leading the fight against child sexual abuse, both in the physical and virtual world, and believes in a zero-tolerance policy towards the perpetrators of this gruesome crime."*

In her speech, she also stressed on the fact that the crimes occurring in the virtual world usually go unnoticed and, therefore, the perpetrators remain unpunished. To tackle this issue, she emphasized on how stakeholders from various sections of society need to collaborate to create a safe space for children online. On behalf of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra she welcomed suggestions, solutions, and policy level strategies to combat online sexual exploitation of children and assured that the Ministry will continue to work in collaboration to combat sexual abuse of children in the state. The speech set a positive tone for the webinar.

The webinar had distinguished speakers from different walks of life which ensured that the issue was looked at in a holistic manner.

## Session 1

The first speaker was **Mr. Guillermo Galarza**, Director, Law Enforcement Training & Technology, International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children. The focus of his address was to discuss the importance of coordination between various departments and nations by giving the example of an MoU signed between the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), India and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

He spoke about how these crimes are violent and extremely real even though they occur in the virtual world. The victims who are mostly minor children are very real, too. He stressed on how the internet is used for bullying, harassment, pornography, sexual abuse, and grooming daily. He emphasized on sensitizing parents, educators, and children themselves on the complexities of online crimes.

He highlighted the fact that very often the perpetrators are people close to the children, such as parents, guardians, neighbours, extended family, friends, nannies, teachers, etc.

From his experience of working with law enforcement agencies across the world, he brought to light some very dark realities of how exploitative images of children are collected, downloaded, shared, and circulated across borders. He emphasized on how India has a good set of laws, but they can be effective only if they are implemented correctly. To better understand the issue, Mr. Galarza shared a pictorial representation showcasing the chain effect by pinning on a digital map IP addresses of users actively accessing pornographic material involving children's images and videos.

He gave the example of how the state of Kerala and its law enforcement agencies have successfully set up a special unit to combat online sexual exploitation of children, and how each state in India must follow similar practice. He concluded his session by bringing back the focus on the importance of capacity building, and how we need to equip ourselves with the required tools and technologies to fight the crime of online sexual exploitation of children, specifically during the present scenario.

## Session 2

The second speaker, **Mr. Manoj Abraham**, IPS, ADGP(HQ) & Nodal Officer, Kerala Police Cyberdome, shared the best practices followed in the state of Kerala, which truly inspired other states to take similar action. He spoke about how widespread the issue of online sexual exploitation of children is, and that it is a crime beyond borders without geographical limitation. He talked about how the Kerala police have initiated steps to make the state of Kerala completely child friendly. He also shined a light on how, since the lockdown, there has

been a significant increase in the number of downloads of exploitative content involving children. This shows that, like children, criminals are spending a large amount of their time online.

Very realistically, Mr. Abraham laid out the problems that law enforcement agencies face in tackling crimes in the virtual world. He mentioned how criminals increasingly use encryption to cover their trails which then makes it challenging for the police to investigate such crimes and to collect and present admissible evidence in the court of law. He stressed on a disturbing fact that most of the children being exploited online are minors, mostly between the ages of 10-15 years or even younger.

He shared the work that the Kerala police have been doing through Cyberdome and its public-private partnership with agencies like INTERPOL, other law enforcement agencies in the country and across the world, including academics and field experts. He stressed on how this public-private partnership has helped prevent the crime to a large extent in Kerala while spreading awareness in the community.

He also shared how the Kerala police have formally teamed up with educational institutions to raise awareness on cyber security among educators, parents, and children which they have termed the Kid Glove Program. He concluded his speech by requesting the audience to focus on internet monitoring, awareness, trainings, and information-sharing through the public-private partnership.

### **Session 3**

The next speaker was **Mr. Satya Yadav**, Head, Trust & Safety, Facebook India, who gave deep insight into the various steps taken by Facebook to prevent such heinous crimes from taking place on their virtual platforms. He started his session by reiterating Facebook's mission statement which is to build a community and bring people together. He laid out in detail the number of people using various messaging platforms and social media applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook which is roughly around 700 million users and almost half of them belong to India.

He emphasized on how the objective of the internet and social media is to connect people, to build businesses, and to entertain but also pointed to the fact that a certain section of people use the internet to commit crimes and exploit children. He placed importance on the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to combat online sexual abuse of children. He explained how Facebook's policies, security, and community standards are structured and

stressed upon the fact that Facebook utilizes the skills and recommendations of NGOs and other experts to develop such policies.

Mr. Yadav shared how the practice of content moderating at Facebook helps users report objectionable and criminal activities online. He spoke about the use of artificial intelligence to detect exploitative images and videos through photo DNA technology in order to prevent users from uploading and accessing such files in the future. He also mentioned how Facebook has partnered with international universities in regularly updating their policies and releasing transparency reports. He concluded his session by emphasizing on the need to implement policies to make online platforms a safe space for adults and children alike.

## **Session 4**

The fourth speaker **Dr. Harish Shetty**, who is a child psychiatrist in Mumbai, addressed the issue of online sexual exploitation of children by shifting the focus from perpetrators and the diverse nuances of the crime to the victims themselves.

He spoke about abuse by young adults in schools and at places of residence. He stressed on the fact that awareness is the key, and it should be targeted at parents, teachers, and caregivers. He talked about how educational institutions should adopt a child safety policy to ensure security of children in their institutions. He spoke about an initiative called “Don’t Offend India” that has been undertaken by him and his colleagues in the field of mental health to identify and medically rehabilitate individuals who show potential signs of pedophilia.

Moreover, he emphasized the need for detailed investigations of cases while planning strategic interventions to increase reporting in the community as well as called for a movement to deter such crimes from occurring.

He concluded his session by highlighting the need for a mental health relief package for the victims, one that would provide rehabilitative measure post judicial trials.

## **Session 5**

The final speaker, **Mr. Krishna Sastry Pendyala**, Executive Director, PwC India, highlighted the importance of public awareness and suggested that every school should inculcate cyber-ethics within its curriculum.

He spoke about the changing trends around the crime on online sexual abuse of children and emphasized on moving from a reactive approach to a proactive and predictive approach.

He shared about the data hiding technologies and methods used by criminals and abusers such as encryption and steganography, which is the act of covertly inserting exploitative and pornographic content in a video containing harmless content. He also stressed upon how criminals are usually always a step ahead of law enforcement agencies and use proxy IP addresses and virtual currencies like BITCOIN to make the crime appear almost non-existent.

He focused on the fact that, India not being a signatory to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2004) has hindered the global information sharing process, thereby preventing law enforcement agencies from accessing international database of offenders. Mr. Pendyala laid out the three lines of defence that authorities need to undertake to deter online sexual abuse of children. He said that the first line of defence should be to educate parents, the second to spread awareness among children, and the third was to devise smart technological solutions. He suggested that schools should teach cyber-ethics as part of their curriculum and parents should continuously regulate and monitor the content accessed by children.

Lastly, he concluded his session by addressing the need to create a special cyber patrol force which would centralize the investigative efforts and the use of Predictive Approach Strategies to identify occurrences of these crimes.

## **Q & A Session**

The question and answer session allowed the participants to put forth their queries to further understand the complex nature of this crime. One of the questions that was directed at the Hon'ble Minister Adv. Yashomati Thakur was about what steps the Maharashtra Government is undertaking for inter-state and inter-department coordination?

The Hon'ble Minister responded to this by explaining how the department is looking at monitoring such issues at a divisional level and stressed on the fact that more needs to be done by the state government to completely understand the various facets of online sexual abuse of children.

A second question was posed to the Hon'ble Minister on what proactive steps are taken by the government for public awareness?

To this the Hon'ble Minister responded about collaborating with UN agencies like UNICEF and how the department has made efforts to reach out to schools to spread awareness. She also raised the issue of funds being the primary concern in combatting this crime.

Another participant asked the Hon'ble Minister about what steps are being taken during the COVID-19 lockdown period to protect children from online sexual abuse?



The Hon'ble Minister responded to this question by highlighting the Maharashtra state government's efforts to publicise the helpline number 100 to assist reports of domestic violence and child sexual abuse. She also welcomed the idea of inter-state collaboration and adopting some of the learnings and best practices from the state of Kerala and its law enforcement agencies.

A question was posed at Mr. Galarza on inter-country cooperation, and what measures can be taken to curb online sexual abuse of children between borders?

Mr. Galarza responded by stressing on the need for the availability and access to statistical data of all regions as well as the need for webinars such as this one to deliberate on ideas and to learn from one another the best services available to protect children.

A participant posed an interesting question to Mr. Satya Yadav asking if Facebook and Instagram have the capacity to suo moto report online crimes?

Mr. Yadav responded to the question by stating the fact that Facebook is legally bound to report all kinds of child sexual exploitation occurring on its social media platforms to NCMEC. He also mentioned that they share this data with the NCRB and other state agencies.

A question was posed to Mr. Pendyala on what are the key areas that can be improved in the current policy structure from an Indian perspective?

Mr. Pendyala addressed the question by emphasizing on formulation and implementation of effective training policies for investigative purposes and collection of evidence and presentation of the same in the court of law. He stressed on the need for developing standard operating procedures to address the crime of online sexual exploitation of children and initiating steps to be a signatory of the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2004).

## **Vote of Thanks**

The webinar was an excellent forum for all to discuss and deliberate the best practices involved in the various states. It helped to develop a common roadmap to be implemented in various states across the country to better the system and provide policy level solutions to combat online sexual exploitation of children.

The webinar ended with **Mr. Yesudas Naidu**, Head, Partnerships Development, International Justice Mission proposing the vote of thanks and encouraging all dignitaries, speakers, and participants to further collaborate to devise protection measures and policies to continue to protect all children from online commercial sexual exploitation.

## Joint Way Forward- Key Initiatives and Recommendations

The key Initiatives and Recommendations chalked-out at the webinar are as follows:

- **Hon. Minister Adv. Yashomati Thakur**, Women and Child Development Department, Government of Maharashtra stated during the proceedings of the webinar that the Ministry will reach out to Mr. Manoj Abraham, IPS, ADGP(HQ) & Nodal Officer, Kerala Police Cyberdome in order to understand the Kerala model of dealing with cybercrime. She further stated that she would like to implement the 'Kerala Cyberdome Model' in the state of Maharashtra.
- **Mr. Guillermo Galarza**, Director, Law Enforcement Training & Technology, International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC) recommended that the national laws to prevent online sexual abuse should be in consonance with the model law on child pornography prepared by ICMEC.
- **Mr. Manoj Abraham**, IPS, ADGP(HQ) & Nodal Officer, Kerala Police Cyberdome has recommended that every state in India should implement a PPP (public-private partnership) model to combat cybercrime. He urged the state governments to reach out to various international agencies and organizations since data-sharing is the only way to end online sexual exploitation of children.
- **Mr. Satya Yadav**, Head, Trust & Safety, Facebook India urged the law enforcement agencies to use technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to curb the spread of child pornographic material.
- **Dr. Harish Shetty**, child psychiatrist, Mumbai recommended that schools should extensively spread awareness about cybercrimes amongst parents, teachers and children. There is a need for this since the current system only focuses on pedophiles, whereas the perpetrators in majority of the unreported cases are young adults or teachers. Further, he suggested initiating a mental health relief package for victims of online sexual exploitation.
- **Mr. Krishna Sastry Pendyala**, Executive Director, PwC India strongly recommended that India should become a signatory to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2004) which facilitates the global information sharing process and encourages law enforcement agencies to access international database of offenders. He advocated for the creation of a Cyber Patrol Force- a centralized law enforcement agency dealing specifically with cybercrimes. There is a need for centralization since it is a borderless crime. Lastly, he urged participants of the webinar that cyber-ethics should be made part of school curriculums.