



Beyond Greed – Protecting Children Online

November 2018

“We acknowledge our need to change as a Church. Strengthen us to act with justice towards survivors, to listen to our children and to implement policies which create safer communities. Reform us God.”

From the prayer of the Uniting Church to mark the national apology to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

As technology has developed it has improved our ability to share information and be more connected. This has created many positive outcomes in our lives, but also has its negative side. It has also provided new tools to those that seek to do harm to others, including those who engage in child sexual abuse. New technologies have allowed those engaged in child sexual abuse to network with each other like never before and to be able to conceal the abuse and harm they cause from the police. Last year the Australian Federal Police received about 9,700 reports of child sexual abuse material being accessed by Australians. So far this year, that figure is already over 15,000. Many cases of abuse go undetected.

The Uniting Church has committed itself to the struggle against child sexual abuse, both within the churches and the wider community.

Unfortunately, in some cases people engaged in child sexual abuse have been aided by the actions of technology businesses. Mostly, this is driven by greed. Assisting the police comes at a cost to the profits of these businesses, so some would rather not have to assist and only do so if compelled to do so by the law. In our Christian faith we understand that greed is malevolent because greed obtains unneeded wealth for one's self at the expense of another. Thomas Aquinas put it this way, greed “is a sin directly against one's neighbour, since one man cannot over-abound in external riches, without another man lacking them.”

To address this problem the Federal Government has introduced a piece of legislation to the Parliament, the *Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Bill 2018*, that will give law enforcement agencies the power to compel technology companies to assist police in cases of child sexual abuse, where there might be evidence on the devices used by people engaged in child sexual abuse. The position we have taken is that we support the police being given the powers they need to deal with the way new technologies assist those engaged in child sexual abuse, while ensuring there are strict safeguards against the misuse of the powers.

Currently the technology companies and civil liberties organisations are lobbying the opposition parties in the Parliament, such as Labor and the Greens, in an attempt to ensure the legislation is not passed in any form. Some civil liberty and human rights organisations publicly promote tools that can be used by paedophiles to conceal their activities from the police. While it is important the opposition parties do apply proper scrutiny to the legislation to make sure it gets the balance right, they should not deny the police the essential powers they need in the struggle to eradicate online child sexual abuse.

In some cases speed is essential for the police to act. If a ring of paedophiles learn that one of their members has been arrested the others can move quickly to destroy vital evidence of the abuse they have carried out.

Bad Boys – Technology Companies Behaving Unethically

Technology businesses continue to sometimes behave unethically, especially when doing the right thing will come at a financial cost. We should be willing to trust the intentions of our police over those of profit-driven multinational technology corporations.

Multinational technology corporations have been at the forefront of cheating on paying taxes in the places they are doing business and setting up complex artificial structures to secretly shift their profits to tax havens. Governments have had to mount court cases and introduce new laws to curb this activity.

Brian Lee Davis in the US confessed to owning hundreds of digital photos and videos that showed young children being raped. In July 2017 he was sentenced to a decade in a state prison. Although Google tipped off police about the child sexual abuse files that had crossed its network, the corporation refused to give them access to his gmail account so that the could identify the other paedophiles Brian had been in contact with, despite the fact that police had a search warrant.

UK Prime Minister David Cameron in 2013 had to publicly threaten internet search engines Google, Yahoo and Bing with legislation to compel them to stop supplying search results for child sexual abuse material to people using their service using terms that are explicitly used by paedophiles.

A new documentary, 'The Cleaners', has exposed how multinational technology corporations are exploiting people in the Philippines to screen social media and remove abusive material, including child sexual abuse material. These people are expected to look at up to 25,000 images a day and approve or reject them remaining online. They get inadequate psychological support for being exposed to images of the worst depravity human beings are capable of. It is doubtful that through this process many cases of child sexual abuse get referred to police.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters and e-mails to:

Ms Michelle Rowland MP

Shadow Minister for Communications
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Shadow Attorney General
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

E-mail: Michelle.Rowland.MP@aph.gov.au

Salutation: Dear Mr Dreyfus

Salutation: Dear Ms Rowland

Points to make in your letters or e-mail:

- Express deep concern at the extent of online child sexual abuse and that technology businesses sometimes refuse to assist or even obstruct police investigations into such cases.
- Welcome Labor's commitment to ensuring the police "have the resources and capabilities they require to keep our communities safe". Seek a further commitment that Labor will actively support the Australian police in the tools to assist in addressing the sexual abuse of children in other countries, where Australians are involved in the abuse online. It should not just be about protecting Australian children.
- Express support for Labor to get the balance right in the *Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Bill 2018* to ensure the police have the powers they need to address online child sexual abuse, while providing strict oversight and sanctions against misuse of the powers.
- Seek assurance they will reject amendments put forward by civil liberty groups that would result in those engaged in child sexual abuse being tipped off they are under investigation and giving them time to destroy vital evidence needed by the police.