

**Meeting of the UK Internet Governance Forum – Report back from Hyderabad**

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009, Portcullis House, Westminster  
Chair: Rt Hon Alun Michael MP

**Kathleen Spencer Chapman, NSPCC European Adviser  
Summary of panel speech**

*Background: The UK IGF is convened by Nominet and brings together representatives of the range of sectors involved in the global Internet Governance Forum. The panel was asked to reflect on their experiences of the 3<sup>rd</sup> UN Internet Governance Forum which took place in Hyderabad, India from 3-6 December 2008. Other speakers included Andrew Miller MP, Margaret Moran MP, and Mark Carvell from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), as well as representatives of the London Internet Exchange (LINX) and Intellect. Lord Stephen Carter, Minister for Communications, Technology and Broadcasting, also spoke at the meeting.*

- NSPCC participated in the 2008 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as part of the new European NGO Alliance on Child Safety Online (eNACSO), of which we are a founding member. Tackling internet-related child protection challenges requires working together at European and indeed global level, whether in order to identify children appearing in images of child abuse or to promote safer technologies for use by children.
- For the NSPCC, the IGF process is important in order to engage in and influence discussions which are relevant to child protection. It offers an excellent opportunity to meet with other stakeholders in these debates, including industry, freedom of expression advocates and government representatives at different levels, among others. This is essential to build common understanding, including on potentially divisive questions, and develop consensus around solutions and approaches.
- It is not only attending the Forum itself which is important, but working on an ongoing basis. The NSPCC and eNACSO participated in the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EURODIG) in the autumn as well as being involved in the UK IGF, which we see as a very helpful way of contributing to and capitalising on the global discussions and ensuring they have a real impact.
- At the IGF itself, eNACSO organised a seminar on the implications of the increasing use of mobile technologies for child protection, was closely involved in the Dynamic Coalition on Child Safety Online, and had a representative (John Carr) speaking in one of the plenary panels on “Fostering security, privacy and openness”. We also participated in a range of other meetings.

The state of play on child protection at the IGF:

- On the positive side, child protection had far greater visibility in Hyderabad than in previous years. As well as a number of workshops and seminars explicitly addressing child protection issues, we felt that it was now recognised as a valid and central issue on the agenda. This has a lot to do with the work of a number of organisations over previous years to put child protection in this position.

- However, at the same time we noted a lack of understanding among some participants. For example, it was even said during one of the debates that the issue of child pornography (child abuse images) was being paid too much attention, but it was clear that it was being viewed as an issue of 'harmful content' rather than the reality which is that these are images of real sexual child abuse taking place. The danger is that child protection issues could be pushed off the agenda, or de-prioritised, without being properly addressed. For example, there are still many countries that don't even recognise 'child pornography' in legislation.

Comments on the IGF as a process:

- For us the IGF remains a crucial process in ensuring that global child protection challenges related to the internet are tackled.
- I would like to echo the frustration expressed by other speakers here about the low level of engagement by industry, in particular the absence of high level industry representatives. While this may have been partly due to the tragic attacks in Mumbai just before the Hyderabad meeting, which led to many cancellations, we are concerned that the IGF is not seen as an important forum for engagement by industry, undermining its impact. It is important to secure greater engagement from industry in future.
- One of the great values of the IGF is its multistakeholder nature and the opportunity it presents to make crucial links between a whole range of issues through bringing together a range of interest groups who can engage on a relatively equal basis. Speaking from a civil society perspective this is extremely important, and an important distinction from a formal UN process.
- The attempts of the IGF Secretariat to bring different issues and groups together to make these crossovers did make better use of this opportunity than in previous years, however we feel that there is still room for improvement. Certainly for child protection, there seemed to be a core group of participants shuffling between the various child protection-specific meetings with limited participation from other groups we would have liked to talk to. This is a learning point for us which we will be taking forward for the Egypt meeting. Equally the plenary meetings, while representing progress on the previous years, need to be tightened up to ensure more meaningful exchange.
- Having said that, some of the seminars and dynamic coalitions were very useful. For example we made useful links with those involved in the Bill of Rights Dynamic Coalition, to ensure that children's rights were taken into account there and start discussing the need to balance rights which are perceived to conflict in the context of the internet.
- In this respect there were some very interesting discussions about minimum principles and standards on the internet in different areas. We were involved in discussions about the idea of a bill of rights specifically for the internet, or whether it would be better to consider how to translate existing rights to the context of the internet. We would veer towards the latter. Similar ideas were appearing on the development of minimum standards and principles on different aspects.
- I've mentioned the importance for children's rights and child protection NGOs of a multi-stakeholder and global process like the IGF. The NSPCC is in the relatively privileged position of having been able to take part in it, largely due to our engagement at European level. However, for many, indeed most, civil society organisations this is just not possible due to a lack of human and financial resources. So there is still a long way to go to really ensure the IGF is genuinely multi-stakeholder, and globally so, with child protection and other types of NGOs from across the world being able to take part.

To conclude:

- We are encouraged that child protection is more visible on the IGF agenda, but this does not mean the job is done. We will work to build on this position during the preparations for the next IGF and beyond, to secure tangible outcomes for children, and we urge you to do as well.
- As a final reflection - it is noticeable that children and young people themselves, while one of the most important groups of internet users, are absent from the discussions themselves. If we truly want a rights-based internet, and a rights-based IGF, more needs to be done to ensure that the views and concerns of children and young people themselves are reflected at the Forum. The right to participation is one of the key rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are many examples of how this can be done from the NSPCC and other children's NGOs.

For further information please contact:

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