

Assistant Secretary Julie Myers

Remarks

Project Safe Childhood National Conference

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Washington, D.C.

Good afternoon. It's an honor to join the distinguished members of this panel and to work with so many people who are dedicated to protecting children.

As the largest investigative agency in the Department of Homeland Security, ICE has a broad portfolio. But we have made protecting America's children an integral part of our homeland security and public safety mission. We're very proud to be a partner with Project Safe Childhood in this endeavor.

Let me tell you about one case that illustrates why this conference is so important.

Earlier this year, ICE agents and the Royal Thai Police executed a search warrant on the Bangkok apartment of Steven Erik Prowler, a 57-year-old Los Angeles man who lived and worked as a teacher in Thailand.

While searching Prowler’s apartment, they found more than 100 photos of naked males, ranging in age from 14 to 16. They also found numerous hand-written journals in which Prowler described sexual encounters dating back more than a decade with underage males in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Mexico. And finally, agents found vials, labeled with boys' names and ages, containing locks of hair.

Prowler later told ICE agents he saved the photos and hair as “souvenirs” of the children he had molested.

Like so many other cases we all investigate, this case was truly heinous. I’m pleased that ICE played a key role in bringing Prowler to justice. But we certainly didn’t do it alone.

We received exceptional cooperation and support from the United Kingdom's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), police departments in Toronto and Edmonton, Canada and the

Queensland, Australia Police Department. As in most cases, more than one ICE office was also involved. This case was worked by ICE agents in Nashville, Phoenix, Charlotte and Grand Rapids, our Cyber Crimes Center (C3) and our international Attaché offices in Canada, Great Britain and Australia.

It's that kind of partnership and broad thinking that will bring us success in protecting our children from predators.

We were able to go after Prowler because ICE has the authority, among other things, to enforce the PROTECT Act. This extraterritorial law allows us to hold individuals accountable who leave the United States to abuse children overseas. I'm so thankful to United States Attorneys across the country and DoJ's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section who have been key partners with us in aggressively pursuing these PROTECT Act cases.

Let me take just a few minutes to tell about some of the other authorities ICE brings to the Project Safe Childhood partnership.

ICE is charged with enforcing civil and criminal immigration law, which may sound like it has little to do with what we're talking about

today. In fact, this gives us the ability to detain and deport aliens who have been convicted in the United States -- either in state or federal court -- of crimes against children.

In an investigation against a child predator, ICE's immigration authorities can supplement other enforcement options.

Just last week, ICE and the New York City Department of Probation arrested 45 child predators and criminal alien sex offenders in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan. All of the individuals were on probation in New York City for prior felony or misdemeanor convictions including rape, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, criminal sexual act, endangering the welfare of a child and course of sexual conduct. The youngest victim was just seven years old. An example of the individuals we arrested using our immigration authorities -- a Panamanian national who had previously been arrested by the New York City Police Department and charged with 8 counts of rape, 14 counts of sexual abuse, 8 counts of sexual misconduct, 8 counts of incest, course of sexual conduct against a child and endangering the welfare of a child. He was convicted of attempted rape and sentenced to five years probation. His victim was just 11 at the time of the crime. This

individual now faces deportation.

Under criminal immigration statutes, ICE can also look for predators who have been previously deported or who have committed other violations of immigration law. The penalties can be significant. Re-entry after deportation, depending on the circumstances, can carry a maximum sentence of two to 20 years.

ICE also has tremendous investigative capacity within the framework of our child pornography authorities, which are specifically aimed at shutting down the exchange of child pornography over the Internet, particularly those that cross borders. It is not unusual for us, and probably you too, to see case in which a server is in one country, the money-men in a second country, the victim and child pornography producers in a third country, and the consumers all over the world.

One of our more recent initiatives to attack the international scope of the problem is to serve as the primary U.S. partner in the Virtual Global Taskforce. The VGT is a law enforcement network comprised of ICE, the Australian High-Tech Crime Centre, the United Kingdom's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Interpol.

Just two weeks ago here in Washington, all of the partners met to discuss how we can better target predators who engage in online child exploitation.

Among the topics we discussed was the U.S launch of a project to designate investigators from each of the agencies for around the clock Internet “watch” shifts, a virtual 9-1-1 for exigent online threats to the safety of children in any of the countries.

The 24/7-watch concept is important because online predators pose serious risks to children when they go looking for instant gratification. Now, for the first time, through the Virtual Global Task Force we are creating an instant, global response - a presence that can deliver a true 24/7 police response when it receives information on some danger or threat to a child.

Let me tell you about a case in which the VGT partnership has already produced early success.

In this instance, information provided in a chat room and reported to authorities in the U.S. indicated that a person in England planned to molest his children within the next few hours.

Investigators in both countries immediately went into action, and within 120 minutes of the first report, local police officers in the U.K. were at this man's door. Their resulting investigation uncovered images of child pornography, and his arrest ended the risks he posed to children.

Our ICE attaché in London played an important role in that case. ICE attachés are stationed in more than 50 international locations, work with foreign governments and their foreign law enforcement counterparts to enhance coordination and cooperation on crimes that cross borders.

Another important member of the U.S. team that responded in that VGT case was the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and I'm delighted that Lee Heath, Chief Postal Inspector, is joining me on the panel today.

In addition to the VGT case, Lee's team at USPIS, along with the CEOS team, U.S. Attorney Chris Christie and countless other prosecutors around the country, played a key role in one of our landmark cases – Assistant Attorney General Fisher just mentioned it – the Regpay case.

There are just a few things I'd like to add to what she said, because it's a case that illustrates another of our authorities -- the ability to follow

the money.

That case started with a task force investigation into people and corporations laundering proceeds from Internet child pornography.

The investigation marked the first time the U.S. government had targeted the financial side of this horrible crime.

As AAG Fisher mentioned, in Regpay's first phase, 35 people in the United States, France and Spain—including three of Regpay's top officers in Europe—were arrested on various criminal charges. In addition, officers from Connections USA, a Florida firm which processed all of Regpay's U.S. credit card transactions, and two LB Systems, Inc., a Southern California company created to assist Regpay process credit card transactions, were arrested, and have pleaded guilty to their involvement in the laundering scheme.

But that was not the end of the case, because during the Regpay investigation we seized electronic billing records documenting as many as 100,000 credit card transactions involving pornography purchases of at least \$1.85 million from these Web sites.

With so many possible leads, we literally sat down with DOJ

prosecutors to develop a coordinated action plan for how to move forward against the purchases. We developed guidelines that could be applied nationwide to ensure that the leads could be followed in a way that made sense not only from a public safety standpoint, but from an operational and prosecutorial standpoint.

Among the things we did was to prioritize individuals with access to children and those who help positions of trust in their communities. We also targets individuals with multiple transactions. In short, we went after the “worst of the worst” first – teachers, camp counselors, clergy, pediatricians, and even, regrettably, law enforcement officers...

These arrests and new related investigations continue today. Just last week, a Regpay lead took ICE agents to Hamburg, New York, where they arrested Ronald Norris, a teacher at Frontier High School in Hamburg, for possession of child pornography. Norris gave ICE agents consent to search his computer, and the forensic investigation revealed numerous child pornography images. Norris also led ICE investigators to a series of compact discs that contained images of pre-pubescent boys involved in various sexual acts.

We look at all of the cases I've mentioned as part of Operation

Predator, which we started in July of 2003 as our first major initiative to protect children.

Operation Predator is a comprehensive initiative designed to protect children from alien smugglers, human traffickers, child pornographers and other predatory criminals. The program does that by focusing all of the authorities I mentioned in a coordinated partnership with other federal, state and local agencies.

Since starting Operation Predator, we've arrested more than 9,000 people who either have preyed upon, or were attempting to prey upon, children in the United States and abroad. The targets include non-citizen child sex offenders whose crimes render them deportable from the United States, as well as U.S. citizens and residents suspected of sex crimes against children.

Operation Predator's success is both tragic and promising. Tragic in that it reminds each of us of the pervasiveness of the child exploitation problem. Promising in that it demonstrates that we can achieve real results when we take a coordinated approach.

The reality is that developments in technology, travel and

communication have torn down the walls between countries and peoples. Technology and the Internet are used not only to bring us together and advance understanding, but also to facilitate a broad range of criminal activity, including child exploitation.

We can't tackle this volume alone. There is no agency, at any level of government, with unlimited authority and unlimited resources. And when you weigh that statement against the increasing complexity and transnational nature of child exploitation investigations, I believe it's clear that partnering, both within the United States and with our foreign counterparts, must be the centerpiece of how we function in accomplishing our mission.

Fortunately, in addition to federal resources at ICE, DOJ, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the FBI, Secret Service and Diplomatic Security Service, there are approximately 17,000 local police agencies in cities and counties across the United States. Many of those agencies participate in the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program, and the officers who are on those task forces serve as valuable regional resources for assistance to parents, educators, prosecutors, law enforcement personnel and others who work on child victimization

issues.

It's also important to recognize that partnerships can and should extend beyond the law enforcement community. Organizations like the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and World Vision also play an important role in this partnership. They can extend the scope of our efforts and they can help to spread the information and education that parents need to help us protect children.

My hope is that we can build on these partnerships to share information and to ensure that predators worldwide are not in a position to commit their crimes against children again.

I would like to thank you for allowing me to join you today, and all of us in ICE look forward to working with you in this cause.

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