

The internet is a wonderful thing, giving instant access to all the information you could ever need. However, unmonitored and uncensored, it also provides access to all the darkest vices. The world is becoming aware of the threat to children the internet poses, and countries are taking action to combat sexual predators who groom young girls in chat rooms and the like. It is a very sad fact of life that Ukraine is seen as a prime location for sex tourism and child pornography, and because of this, as more and more Ukrainian kids get on line, the threat to them could be even more extreme. One man, Hollywood actor Tony Schiena, visited Ukraine last week to try and get the government to sign up to his new IC3O protocol, aimed at combating this serious problem.

Fighting the Internet Threat To Children



Tony Schena, a world karate champion and rising star in Hollywood, found himself involved in the project after a trip to Baghdad last year. When he returned to Washington D.C. he attended a debriefing, and after that debriefing he met a man who was going to send his life in a completely different direction. "After the debrief I met the Sheriff of Bedford County, Virginia, and he told me about an operation he'd started called Blue Reach Thunder which had become a task force which targeted internet crimes against children," Tony explains.

A Chance Meeting

Tony had his eyes opened during that meeting, and freely admits he was truly shocked by what the Sheriff told him. Tony at the time was too busy with other things, but months later the Sheriff invited him down to their location to take a look at the work they were doing. "The stuff they showed me on the internet, what was going on, I wanted to get sick in the corner of the office," he says with a shudder. "Right then and there I realised that if I walk out of there and don't do something about it then it says a lot about me, to myself."

Before acting, straight out of school, Tony had gone into military security, and with this background he realised that this was something to which he could contribute. It brought him back into a world that he'd left behind, but it was something that was still a big part of him. He knew he had to do something to help.

From that point on, Tony became a member of the task force and became very hands on. A little later he was approached by a renewable energy organisation that was part of the UN, and asked if he would become involved in their project. "But I told them," he says. "I understand renewable energy is a problem, but this is my problem, and when they heard what my problem was they helped me with contacts in the UK who in turn helped me to form the IC30 organisation."

So what exactly is IC30? The first thing Tony points out is that it is not IC30, but IC3O, the 'O' standing for organisation, and the 3C meaning cyber control for children. "It's an inter-governmental organisation that fosters co-operation between governments and NGOs for the development of software for security and education," he says. "For example, a branch of the IC3O is the Safe Surfing Foundation, and it has educational software for children in age groups between eight and eleven and 12 and 17, that educates them about safety on the internet. What we're aiming for in the States mainly is to have mandatory education teaching kids how to use the internet safely."

The organisation also looks at educating the general public through Public Service Announcements, which go out on network TV, some of which are targeted at adults, and some targeted

at kids. "I went to the best people I know in Hollywood to produce these, and Ridley Scott will be directing them, so they're going to be top quality. This is an important message to get across, and we want to do it well," explains Tony.

Going International

Another aspect of the programme is identifying the risk, and highlighting it to all nations by getting them to sign up to a treaty. "The internet connects all of us," says Tony. "This superhighway of interconnectivity has changed the world. It's changed the way we access music and movies, and how people meet each other. It's also given the bad guys a whole new platform. It's given child predators a new platform. And it knows no national or social boundaries."

Tony has now been spending months travelling the world and meeting with diplomats and leaders of many different countries with the aim of getting them to sign up to the treaty. Once enough countries have signed up it can be ratified under the UN, and then countries can co-operate and share information. "It will mean we can start catching up to these guys. They're way ahead of us at the moment," Tony says, shaking his head.

So just how big a problem is this? Tony becomes even more passionate about his topic when I ask this question. "This transcends all echelons of society. We've arrested diplomats and police chiefs. No one understands how big a problem this is. If you have a child on the internet, there's a 100% chance they'll get approached by a child predator. 100%!"

Tony admits that they just don't have the manpower to stop it, and that the only long-term solution to the problem is education – educating the children, the parents, and the governments about just how big a problem this is.

Acknowledging the fact that Ukraine is a centre for child pornography and sex tourism, Tony admits that's why the country is high on his list of priorities. "Russia and Ukraine are where the majority of child pornography videos are created," he says. "And so both these countries are already in the thoughts of paedophiles around the world. But when it comes to children being approached on the internet, Ukraine doesn't really have the accessibility to computers to the same extent as Europe or the States."

That, of course, is rapidly changing and therefore Tony and his treaty have come to Ukraine at exactly the right time. With all the sex tourists finding potential Ukrainian partners online, it's not that much of a stretch to realise that these targeting kids can find them just as easily. "It's inevitable that it's going to become as big a problem here as in other parts of the world. But the real issue in Ukraine is that this is where child pornography is manufactured. Whatever we can do now on education and security is brilliant, because by the time

all those computers get in the schools and homes, the kids, parents and teachers will already be aware of the problem," says Tony.

According to Tony, Ukraine needs to get signed up to IC3O as soon as possible, because then all the other countries involved can lend assistance. "This is about helping. This isn't about ego, pride or money. This is about cooperation," he says.



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To get the message across of just how big a problem this is, Tony describes an instance when he went online posing as a 14-year-old girl. "It was just a normal chat room, and within one hour I'd been approached by 15 adult men, all of whom almost instantly started talking about sex," he says, going on to give me some details about exactly how perverse some of these instructions were. I won't go into the details here because it's just too disgusting, but please, anyone with kids, make sure you monitor their internet activity. ■