

**Statement of Rep. Christopher H. Smith, Co-Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**“Protecting Children: The Battle Against Child Pornography
and Other Forms of Sexual Exploitation”
September 27, 2006**

Mr. Chairman, I join you in expressing deep concern over the proliferation of child pornography and the perpetration of other crimes against children through trafficking, prostitution and sex tourism. Each year thousands of American kids are victimized through pornography, many subjected to violence in the process. The shocking reality is that often the perpetrators and purveyors of these crimes are parents or relatives of the victim. According to experts, at least half of those victimized are boys. The emotional, physical, and psychological toll on our youth caused by these crimes is overwhelming. It is known that the heavy toll contributes to the measurable rise in depression and suicide.

While more research is needed into the various facets of sexual exploitation of children, there are strong indicators that those captivated by pornography are more likely to become predators and purveyors themselves, further feeding the cycle. As with other addictive behaviors, these individuals are often driven into more extreme acts preying on younger victims or employing violence. Organized crime, including gangs, also appears to be venturing further into the lucrative trade in children. As a result, global criminal networks are springing up, further complicating efforts to prosecute those responsible for these horrendous crimes against children.

The anti-trafficking efforts have convinced me that combating sexual exploitation of children in all its forms requires comprehensive laws as well as effective partnership between law enforcement and the non-governmental community at all levels: local, regional, national, and international.

Earlier this year, I sponsored a resolution at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to encourage other participating States – 56 countries in all – to strengthen their laws relating to sexual exploitation of children as a means of facilitating investigation and prosecution of these crimes and the essential international cooperation between law enforcement agencies. I appreciate very much Commissioner Pitts’ diligence in securing approval for this proposal at the Assembly meeting in Brussels. Now that we have support at the parliamentary level, I look forward to further action on this initiative at the OSCE Ministerial scheduled for early December. I would point out that the United States is working very closely with Belgium and France on a comprehensive package to combat these forms of exploitation. This work would not have been possible without the vital contribution of the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children.

I also want to thank the consortium of NGOs – headed by Shared Hope International, ECPAT-USA, and the Protection Project – for their work on the Report from the U.S. Mid-Term Review on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in America being released at this hearing. Their report takes an in-depth look at the essential aspects of prevention, prosecution

and protection absolutely necessary to effectively combat the sexual exploitation of children and care for victims. This report takes stock of our efforts to date and offers important recommendations to build on this work.

Exactly twenty years ago, Attorney General Ed Meese released the final report of the Commission on Pornography. That landmark Report drew the inextricable link to abuse and stressed that “child pornography must be considered as substantially inseparable from the problem of sexual abuse of children.” A number of us worked hard to have the recommendations outlined by the Commission translated into law. What was then considered a “cottage industry” has now exploded into a multinational, multibillion dollar enterprise with potential outlets in every home and office connected to the Internet.

The roots and scope of this problem are immense, literally surrounding us if we take time to notice. Right here on the streets of Washington, DC, 3,000 kids a year are arrested for prostitution and those are surely but the tip of the iceberg. At the time of the Meese Report two decades ago, 30,000 sexually exploited children had been identified in Los Angeles alone. The enormity of this problem requires a commensurate effort on our part, otherwise the cycle of abuse will only continue to build.

I look forward to hearing from our law enforcement professionals and dedicated experts from the private sector so that together, we can further our partnership on behalf of vulnerable kids in this country and beyond.