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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

LET US PROTECT PARENTS' RIGHTS

I write to you again about the protection of our young people from internet porn intruding into their homes against their parents' wishes. Currently, there is a battle between the Commonwealth Government and most pornographic Internet Services Providers (ISPs) over this matter.

The Government is trialling an internet filtering system to prevent internet porn providers breaking through home internet filters. On Australia Day 2009, I made a statement encouraging all in the Diocese to do what they can to support the Commonwealth Government in this battle.

The current media campaign

Recently, *The Australian* newspaper reported (14 July page 25) on a media campaign to generate public opposition against the Government's efforts to filter pornographic ISPs. This campaign is being conducted by a political activist group called GetUp. One has to wonder who are behind GetUp. The campaign consists of satirical advertisements for a product called Censordyne.

The Australian reports that the basic objection by GetUp to the Government's initiative to protect parents' rights in their own homes is that 'the Government can decide what we can and cannot do online'. By ignoring the Government's intention, such an argument is very misleading. It ignores the fact that the Government *seeks to protect people, not to control*.

GetUp also seems to support the particularly strange argument that to attempt to filter pornographic ISPs is futile because no filter can resist the technology of websites. If the Government efforts are futile, why be concerned about them?

The internet brings responsibilities to us all. This includes deterring predators who seek to exploit the young and to violate the rights of parents to protect their children.

Qantas airline has refused to run the GetUp advertisement. However, according to *The Australian*, some television channels will cooperate with this effort to undermine Government efforts.

Violation of basic parental rights

Research shows that the vast majority of Australian parents do not want their children exposed to internet porn. Many attempt to prevent this in their homes by the use of computer filters.

In my Australia Day Statement, I outlined how, while some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) self filter, many more predatory ISPs have developed, and are continuing to develop, other technology to break through home internet filters used by parents.

This is an obvious violation of the rights of parents in their own homes. It shows contempt for parents' rights to decide the values they want to hand on to their children, and what their children should not see in the home.

GetUp is pressing for internet porn to be free of the normal censorship requirements even of TV programmes and movies. Taken to its logical conclusion, the GetUp position would mean that there should be no control of media whatsoever – including against racial and religious discrimination and hate crimes.

How porn sites can capture the young

The Australia Day Statement described how a child or a young teenager can be led unexpectedly to porn sites, while searching innocently for internet sites related to popular sports stars, movies and movie stars. While I have never done so, it seems to me quite easy for a curious underage teenager to register at a porn site, claiming to be over eighteen.

Parents since the Statement was issued have given other examples. One father told me of his fear at his young daughter wanting to look up ‘Barbie Dolls’.

It is deeply disturbing when young people cannot safely follow innocent interests. It is wrong that they should need protection against predatory porn sites whose sole interest is profit.

Some effects of pornography

Pornography causes considerable harm to people. For many, it is addictive. It is all too common also that criminals guilty of grave sex crimes, including those against children and young people, have been porn addicts.

Porn also promotes depersonalising attitudes towards others. It encourages their use as ‘sex objects’. It nurtures tolerance for one human person using another for purposes of sexual gratification. This violates attitudes needed for a democratic society, such as respect for the dignity and equality of every member.

It is a perverted frame of mind that leads pornographic websites to work to destroy internet filters parents use to try to protect children in their homes from this evil addiction.

I have referred previously in the Australia Day Statement to my pastoral experience of the sufferings of New York homeless young people forced into prostitution, which included grave abuses by the same porn industry that now is being defended by GetUp. The young people I encountered directly ranged from a nine year old boy to young adults who usually were unemployed.

Any parent who is indifferent to the GetUp campaign should remember that the porn industry would be just as happy to exploit their child, teenager or young adult as it was to exploit those I met personally while studying in the United States. It is the children and young people I have come to know over the decades of my priestly ministry that has led to me to continue to follow and to research this issue so closely.

For all practical purposes, GetUp is seeking really to undermine parents’ attempts to protect our young by dressing up its objection as support for freedom of speech. GetUp would be better named CoverUp, for this effectively is what they are trying to do. They are not telling the full story.

What can we do?

Evil grows in society when good people do nothing to prevent it. If we do nothing, while groups such as GetUp agitate on behalf of porn websites, we will be failing in our social responsibility, especially to families and our young.

I urge you to consider the following:

- discuss with others the predatory efforts of the porn industry to corrupt our young
- discuss the effects of the internet porn industry on both participants and viewers
- raise with others the issue of the internet porn industry working to destroy parental efforts to protect their young from internet porn
- inform others of the Commonwealth Government's efforts to protect children and young people from internet porn coming into their homes
- write a brief letter of support to:

Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
Suite MG70
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

or email minister@dbcde.gov.au
or send a fax to 03 9650 3251

The letter could be as simple as:

Dear Senator Conroy

I wish to express my support for your initiative on behalf of the Commonwealth Government to filter pornographic Internet Service Providers.

Yours sincerely

Send copies of your letter to Senator Conroy to your Federal Member of Parliament and Western Australian Senators (Page 273 of the White Pages section of the 2009/10 South Western (WA) Yellow Pages or alternatively go on line <http://australia.gov.au/directories/parliament-of-australia-contacts> for Federal Government contacts and <http://wa.gov.au/guidetogovernment/> for State Government contacts).

Again, I urge you all to do everything you can to resist the efforts of predatory internet porn providers to undermine the efforts of parents to protect their families.

God bless you all

Most Rev Gerard J Holohan
Catholic Bishop of Bunbury

3rd August 2009