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Joint statement

on the occasion of the 2024 edition of the Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November)

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“Emerging technologies: threats and opportunities for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse”

November 18, 2024 marks the Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. On this occasion, the focus is on the threats posed by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality or robotic innovation, but also the opportunities they offer to fight against any case of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated against children.

First and foremost, the diversification of technological tools means that the risks hanging over children are constantly multiplying. One of these new threats is the proliferation of fake images and videos, known as “deepfakes”, of both real and fictitious children. Regardless of the origin of the image, and whether or not the child depicted actually exists, it is crucial to consider the dissemination of such content as a criminal offence, and to adopt an appropriate response in terms of regulation and sanctions. Indeed, we believe that the perpetrators of “deepfakes” pose just as much risk to children as those possessing material of sexual abuse committed on “real” children, not least because of the psychological impact such practices can have. Virtual images possibly generated by AI are indeed harmful to children because they normalize sexual activity with children and are used for grooming to abuse children. In this respect, we would therefore like to invite States to lift any reservations they may have made on the basis of article 20.3 of the Lanzarote Convention, in order to ensure robust and comprehensive protection. We would also like to reiterate that any sexual offence committed against a child and facilitated by emerging technologies falls within the scope of the criminal sphere, whatever the means used.

We would also like to emphasise the importance of not taking legal action against children who distribute content of a sexual nature generated by themselves, featuring other children, and initially intended for their private use, but rather to carry out awareness-raising actions among them and provide support adapted to their age. In this regard, we call the Lanzarote Committee to strengthen its action on the matter, for instance by continuing to promote the participation of children in its work, as it did in the frame of the 2nd monitoring round.

While emerging technologies present many risks, we also recognize that they can be put to good use, providing innovative solutions for reporting suspicious online behaviour, identifying offenders, speeding up the removal of content, preventing it from being shared or published repeatedly, or facilitating the identification of victims and improving the assistance they receive in investigations and prosecutions.

It is recognized that these tools can also be put to good use in improving the training of professionals in contact with children, who need to keep abreast of the latest developments and practices in this field. For instance, technologies such as virtual reality can be used to create an empathetic space and a context adapted to a child victim/survivor, facilitating dialogue and therapeutic treatment.

Moreover, educating children to the appropriate use of technology remains an undeniable priority. We therefore emphasize the need to reinforce prevention and awareness-raising initiatives carried out by all relevant stakeholders, including online services actors, such as AI platforms, which have exclusive access to information on the misuse of their platforms.

Finally, we welcome the fact that the Lanzarote Convention, ratified by all 46 member States, continues to serve as a reference in the fight against all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and we call for its provisions to be duly implemented. We also welcome the [declaration](#) adopted at the 43rd meeting of the Committee of the Parties to the Lanzarote Convention.

The Convention on Cybercrime (ETS no. 185) and the recent Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (CETS no. 225) are also texts of major interest in the fight against sexual abuse facilitated by emerging technologies.

Among the other tools at our disposal to effectively fight against this threat, we encourage all States to use a common terminology, such as that presented in the [Luxembourg guidelines](#), in order to strengthen collective understanding of this phenomenon, as well as inter-state and inter-sectoral cooperation.

Hence, it is important to regularly examine emerging trends and assess the negative impact that new technologies can have, in order to provide national and international responses, tailored to the needs of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to update national legislations.