![ChildFund Alliance logo]

Global Experts and Members of ChildFund Alliance's WEB Safe & Wise Children's Advisory Council Convene in Manila to Tackle Online Harms to Children
As the digital landscape rapidly evolves, so do the benefits and risks to young people

[MANILA] - Global experts in online safety and members of ChildFund's WEB Safe & Wise Children's Advisory Council, are gathered in Manila today to discuss the most pressing dangers to children online as well as solutions that can be adopted to ensure every child can engage and connect safely online. UNICEF and the International Justice Mission have identified the Philippines as the center of child sex abuse materials production.

High-level government officials in the Philippines, including **Senator Risa Hontiveros** and **Undersecretary Angelo Tapales** from the Council for the Welfare of Children are part of a speaking roster that also features **Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid**, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on Violence against Children; **Julie Inman Grant**, Australia's eSafety Commissioner; **Dr. Mikiko Otani**, Immediate Past Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child; and officials from **UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Office**, **ECPAT Philippines**, **International Justice Mission**, **ChildFund**, and members of the tech industry including **CleanDNS**. Members of the Children's Advisory Council in attendance included young people from **Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, México, Mozambique, Paraguay, Philippines, Uganda and Vietnam**.

"As the digital landscape continues to rapidly evolve, new opportunities for children and young people increase, but so do the threats they face online," says Senior Advisor, Advocacy and Policy, **Ryan DeSouza**, who is leading ChildFund's WEB Safe & Wise initiative. "It's imperative, therefore, that we work together—and *with* children—to create a better digital world. ChildFund Alliance launched WEB Safe & Wise as a frontline defense against some of the most urgent risks to children online, including the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children."

An estimated 750,000 individuals are looking to connect with children online for sexual purposes at any one time—whether on social media, online gaming sites, or via email. Reports of online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) have increased 15,000% over the last 15 years. In 2022, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) analyzed over 32 million reports of CSAM received from across the globe and reported an 87% increase from 2019. Last year, 9 in 10 victims were between the ages of 3 and 12 years.

In the Philippines, the harm is so prevalent, UNICEF and the International Justice Mission (IJM) identified the country as the center of child sex abuse materials production. In the recent Scale of Harm report by the IJM, researchers found nearly half a million Filipino children in 2022 were trafficked online via live streaming, often by relatives or people they know, in order to produce child sexual exploitation material.

The Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) in the Philippines promises to work closely with other government agencies to address online child sexual abuse and exploitation. In a recent interview, **Undersecretary Angelo Tapales** said his department is working with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, as well as with the private sector to curb the violence and sexual abuse against children.

"Alarmingly, new forms of abuse, such as AI-generated imagery and financial sexual extortion, are significantly on the rise, with dreadful consequences," explains ChildFund Alliance Secretary General **Meg Gardinier**. "Our goal, by working closely with children and young people is to identify solutions they believe can both benefit them, and also keep them safer, when they engage online."

The [Children's Advisory Council](#), includes youth members from across the globe. Ten of the 15 members traveled to Manila to participate in the Safer Internet Day event. Council member **Azumi**, who is from the Philippines said she believes it is urgent that "all young people be given a voice in the fight for a safer online world." Tihitina from **Ethiopia** explained that she is "eager to work on creating a web safe environment for children and young people, and to contribute to driving change." **Moisés** from Mexico, said he seeks "ways to solve the challenges that girls, boys, and young people face in the online environment."

All members of the Council play a key role in determining the planning and implementation of WEB Safe & Wise activities. The platform provides a range of [resources for young people](#) as well as adults, including guidance on [Talking to Young People About Online Safety](#), definitions related to online safety, and key [do's and don'ts](#) when engaging online.

"This is a crime that is unconcerned about borders," shared **Chris Lewis-Evans**, who focuses on detecting and disrupting online harms in his role as director of Internet Harms Mitigation and Governmental Engagement at CleanDNS. Chris spent more than 20 years with the UK's National Cyber Crime Unit. He explained how the advancement of WEB3—a decentralized online ecosystem along with other emerging technologies like AI—poses additional security risks. "There's an absence of clear abuse reporting mechanisms, defined jurisdictional responsibilities, and clear accountability structures," says Chris. "This leaves more children vulnerable to more forms of online abuse."

"Countries need legislation that protects children from the looming dangers of digital predation, coercion, and other terrible abuses that are being facilitated against children online," explains ChildFund Alliance Board Chair **Simon Whyte**. "A key goal of WEB Safe & Wise is to strengthen laws and policies that provide this protection, and to get there, it's critical that people understand the gravity of this threat."

ChildFund urges the creation of governmental bodies, the criminalization of online child exploitation, and the allocation of resources for parent and caregiver education. Technology partners are strongly encouraged to co-create standardized industry safety codes to protect young users from inappropriate content across all platforms.

"On Safer Internet Day 2024, I propose we all commit to making *every day safer* for children online," said **Ryan DeSouza**. "We need to end this global crisis before it harms countless more children. We can and must do better."

For more details and to engage in our campaign, please visit https://websafeandwise.childfundalliance.org/.

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ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching nearly 36 million children and their family members in 70 countries. Our members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change. Our commitment, resources, innovation and expertise serve as a powerful force to help children and families around the world transform their lives.