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22 September 2014

**Hon. Joe Natuman
Honourable Prime Minister of Vanuatu &
Minister Responsible for ICTs & Telecommunications**

**Official Speech: Hon. Prime Minister at the
First Annual Pacific Child On-Line Protection Conference**

Port Vila, Vanuatu, 22-24 September 2014

Honourable Ministers, Government Officials, Telecom and
ICT Industry Leaders, Members of the Press, Distinguished
Guests, Foreign Visitors, Technical Experts, Ladies and
Gentlemen, Students, Girls and Boys:

Welcome to the First Annual Pacific-wide Child On-Line
Protection Conference!

As your Prime Minister and as the Minister responsible for
information and communications technologies – ICTs -- it
is my great pleasure to speak today at the opening of this
important regional Conference.

Today I will talk with you for a few minutes about the
importance of ICTs, the purposes of your work this week,

and the launch of the Vanuatu Child On-Line Assessment Report.

ICTs are changing the world. About 40 percent of the 7 billion people on Earth now have an internet connection. That is up from just 1 percent in 1995. Mobile broadband is growing at 30 percent per year worldwide. The United Nations has called this the “fastest growing technology in the history of mankind.”

ICTs bring enormous benefits, in economic development, in education, health, trade, tourism and a host of other fields.

But there are some issues with ICTs that need to be addressed carefully and forthrightly. One of the most important of these is Child On-Line Protection – which is why we are here today.

Many children and youth now live in a cyber-society that offers incredible information and services instantly on line. But some of that content is not appropriate to our vulnerable children. Risks on the Internet and via communications devices include:

- On line bullying
- Sexual exploitation of children and women
- Fraud
- Violent and pornographic images
- Racism
- Addiction to spending time on-line, to the exclusion of other important activities
- Loss of local culture and language in the face of a tsunami of Western content, mostly in English.

You might think that these are issues only in developed countries. Not true. A survey here in Vanuatu at the Central School in Port Vila by the International Telecommunication Union and TRR revealed some disturbing facts.

Of almost 300 students surveyed, 15 percent had been cyber-bullied. Ten percent admitted to sending bullying messages or texts. Ten percent of the children had been contacted online or via mobile phone by a stranger. Sixty percent faced possible infection by computer viruses, but only 21 percent were using anti-virus software.

So it is our purpose this week to discuss these issues, and to come up with national strategies and action plans to create a better cyber environment for children and youth. We need to do this using a multi-stakeholder approach that emphasizes extensive public consultation and education.

We need to identify key organizations, including NGOs and donor partners, who can support our efforts.

We need to work closely with ICT operators to develop appropriate but not intrusive filtering programs, Codes of Practice and device-based programs that screen out unwanted material.

Most importantly, we need to build our capacity and knowledge of this topic, to take back across the Pacific.

In a related area, I understand that after the Child On-Line conference there will be a workshop on creating a Computer Emergency Response Team for Vanuatu. This is

a great initiative, and I welcome both of these excellent efforts to help improve our on-line environment.

One of my key goals as Prime Minister is to make Vanuatu an ICT leader in Melanesia, the Pacific and even the world. As part of reaching that goal, it now gives me great pleasure to launch the Vanuatu Child On-Line Assessment Report. This Report is the foundation for our efforts in this important area.

I want to thank all the individuals and organizations which contributed to this report. Special thanks go to:

- The Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator – TRR
- The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer
- The International Telecommunication Union – the UN agency that oversees ICT development around the world.

In closing, I want to thank you for coming to this important event, which has generated interest from across the Pacific and the world. We would be happy to see you again in Vanuatu next year for the second annual Conference. We want to hear then how much terrific progress you have made in protecting our most precious possession – our children.

Tank yu tumas!

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