



**Prepared Remarks of Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales
at the Project Safe Childhood Implementation Launch**

**Washington, D.C.
May 17, 2006**

Good morning. I am joined by FBI Director Robert Mueller; Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Julie Myers; President of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Ernie Allen; Deputy Director of the Secret Service, Mark Sullivan; Assistant Inspector in Charge of the United States Postal Inspection Service, Ray Smith; and Lieutenant Mike Harmony from the Bedford County Sheriff's Department and Joe Laramie from the Glendale, Missouri Police Department, two leaders of the Internet Crimes Against Children program.

This group is an indication of widespread cooperation throughout the law enforcement community. There won't be time for everyone to speak today, but I can assure you that each of these leaders represents a vital element of the program we are here to discuss today.

It has been estimated that, at any given time, 50,000 predators are on the Internet prowling for children. Just this morning, I visited the FBI's Innocent Images Unit in Maryland, where I observed some of the aggressive behavior and graphic language used by these online pedophiles as they solicit our children.

I've also seen depraved examples of child pornography, including the sexual abuse of children as young as infants. Words simply cannot describe how unsettling these images are.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we are in the midst of an epidemic of sexual abuse and exploitation of our children.

At the Department, we are working more of these disturbing cases than ever before – thanks to a dedicated team of investigators and prosecutors.

But we need to do more. Today, the Justice Department will begin to implement a new program to better protect our children from sexual abuse and exploitation through the Internet.

Project Safe Childhood will help law enforcement and community leaders develop a coordinated strategy to prevent, investigate, and prosecute sexual predators, abusers, and pornographers who target our children. It begins not one moment too soon.

Law enforcement professionals at every level – and many partners who have joined me here today – understand the urgency for Project Safe Childhood.

Fighting alongside federal law enforcement officials are every day heroes at the State and local level, including our partners in the Department-funded, regional Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces (ICACs). The Justice Department will be awarding more than \$14 million dollars to fund the ICACs this year – including, I am pleased to announce today, the formation of a new Task Force in southern Texas.

We also rely on our long-standing partner the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and other non-profit groups dedicated to keeping our children safe online such as i-Safe, Web Wise Kids, NetSmartz, and many more. The Office of Justice Programs will devote nearly five million dollars this year to Internet safety programs that help educate our children and their parents about the dangers of online predators.

These partners – and many others – will be vital to the success of this new initiative, and I am happy to have their support.

Here's how Project Safe Childhood works.

I've asked every United States Attorney to take the lead on implementing Project Safe Childhood with local partners in their communities. Within two weeks, every U.S. Attorney will review the guide we've published, designate a Project Safe Childhood Coordinator, and begin with three major steps to put this important program into action.

The first step is to build partnerships and capitalize on the experience of our existing partners. U.S. Attorneys will engage everyone with a stake in the future of our children. Together, they will inventory the unique nature of the challenge and the resources available in the community.

Second, these partners will work together as U.S. Attorneys develop a strategic plan for Project Safe Childhood in their area. I've asked U.S. Attorneys to develop these road maps for implementation within 90 days.

Lastly, we'll be ensuring accountability by requiring semi-annual progress reports. We want to know that Project Safe Childhood is having a measurable impact in terms of locking away criminals and identifying and rescuing child victims.

Project Safe Childhood will help make law enforcement more coordinated and better trained as they work to protect our children on the Internet. In addition, we need better legislation; both Houses of Congress have passed legislation addressing crimes against children and I urge Congress to complete this important work and send the President legislation for his signature in the near future. I know that these things will make a real difference in the lives of so many Americans.

I realize that child pornography and sexual enticement are not the only criminal activities that threaten our society. Obscenity debases men and women, fostering a culture in which these heinous crimes against our children become acceptable. That's why I formed the Obscenity Prosecution Task Force in the Criminal Division, which has worked together with their partners to investigate obscenity cases.

Project Safe Childhood will not detract from our efforts in this area; it will enhance our commitment to protect all Americans from these depraved crimes. As a father and a citizen, I care deeply about these issues. And as the chief law enforcement officer, I've made it a priority for the Justice Department to prosecute obscenity, child pornography, and sexual enticement cases.

President Bush has said that "anyone who takes the life or innocence of a child will be punished to the full extent of the law." He has given me the charge of protecting our children from these profound evils.

That is why we are launching Project Safe Childhood – to go after those criminals who would exploit the innocence and steal the dreams of our children.

Thank you. Now, I would like to introduce FBI Director Robert Mueller for a few remarks.