



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Survivors and allies demand urgent action to prevent digital harms and keep children safe online**

*World leaders urged to seize historic opportunity at the inaugural Global Ministerial on Ending Violence Against Children to make bold commitments to create a safe digital world for children and young people*

**6 November, 2024 Bogotá, Colombia:** Today, survivors and allies came together to demand urgent action from world leaders to address the growing threat of online child abuse and ensure a safe digital future for children.

Safe Online, the Brave Movement, and WeProtect Global Alliance, along with 15+ partners, hosted the Satellite event 'Safe Digital Futures for Children'. The event, held at the margins of the inaugural Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, aimed to build momentum and urge governments to end all forms of violence against children, including online violence.

Children globally are experiencing escalating threats in the digital world like grooming, abuse, and sexual extortion. In 2023 alone, 36 million reports of suspected child sexual abuse material were made. Advances in technology, including AI, are intensifying these dangers, posing a global public health crisis and causing severe harms to children's mental and physical well-being.

Online violence is pervasive, impacting children of all ages and genders across the globe. As per the Instituto Nacional de Salud (INS), approximately 30,575 children experienced sexual violence in Colombia in 2023. The Te Protejo hotline, operated by Red PaPapaz, reports that nearly 700 websites were blocked in Colombia in 2023 alone for hosting child sexual abuse and exploitation material.

Advocate Rhiannon-Faye McDonald, a survivor of technology-assisted child sexual abuse and campaigner against online sexual violence, said, *“When I was 13 years old, I was groomed online by a much older man who was pretending to be someone else. No child should ever have to experience what I went through. We have had thirty years to address this, and yet the self-regulation of tech companies has failed miserably in protecting children. The number of children harmed by technology-assisted child sexual abuse is ever-increasing. We see victims and survivors being continually re-traumatised by the ongoing circulation of the images and videos of their sexual abuse.”*



Bad actors continue to exploit technology to abuse children, with inadequate barriers to stop them and insufficient safeguards for children on digital platforms.

Marija Manojlovic, Executive Director of Safe Online, said, "*The rising tide of online violence against children demands urgent action—for far too long, we've left children to navigate the dangers of the digital world on their own. Safe Online, the only global fund dedicated to combating online child sexual exploitation and abuse and other digital harms, has invested nearly \$100 million across 100 countries, yet this is only a drop in the ocean compared to the magnitude of the crisis. Together with Brave and WeProtect Global Alliance, we call for bold, immediate action at the upcoming Ministerial. A safer digital future is within reach—if we act now.*"

The event brought together Ministers and high-level government representatives from nearly 10 countries globally, along with UN officials, policymakers, civil society, academics, industry leaders, media, survivors, and youth groups. Together, they discussed the escalating threats and emerging trends in online harms to children, as well as explored solutions and country-level actions to ensure child online safety.

The event concluded with a strong call to action for governments to ensure that children's safety is embedded in the design of the digital world. It urged governments to accelerate momentum on [survivor-informed Call to Action](#) which advocates for bold, globally aligned legislation that puts children's well-being at the forefront. The Call to Action also emphasises the need for sustainable funding to combat online exploitation and urges that survivors and children remain at the center of all efforts. Additionally, it calls for governments to mandate that online platforms adopt safety-by-design principles and swiftly remove child sexual abuse material.

**ENDS**

### [Notes to editors](#)

#### **Additional quotes:**

- Dr Daniela Ligiero, Founder of The Brave Movement. "As survivors, we know there is no distinction between online and offline abuse. Both destroy lives. Around the world 300 million-plus children have been affected by online exploitation and abuse in the past year alone. All children should be free to grow-up in safety and we need survivors, with their lived experience, to be part of



dialogue and decision-making on how to end this appalling record of digital harms."

- Iain Drennan, Executive Director, WeProtect Global Alliance: "Every second, a child is subjected to online sexual exploitation and abuse. This is not just a statistic; it's a global crisis demanding urgent and unified action. We call on world leaders to step forward now with unwavering commitment and decisive measures. Our children's safety cannot wait—every moment of inaction leaves another child at risk. Together we can - and must - prevent this. Solutions exist, but they require global commitment, and coordinated action across sectors."

### About the organizers

[Safe Online](#) is the only global investment vehicle dedicated to keeping children safe in the digital world - working to strengthen systems and catalyze innovative solutions to make the internet a safe place for children to explore, learn and develop. Since 2017, Safe Online has invested nearly US\$100 million in 106 projects with impact in over 100 countries.

[The Brave Movement](#) is a survivor-centered advocacy movement working to end childhood sexual violence. An integral part of our mission involves supporting survivor leaders advocating to end child sexual exploitation and abuse online and holding tech companies and governments accountable, through a global campaign for a sexual violence-free internet. Our campaign – centered in the experience and knowledge of survivors of childhood sexual violence – is fighting to ensure that the digital world is redesigned and made safe for children. Working with tech companies and governments, and collaborating with partners and allies, we will improve practices and ensure they design a world where every child is safe from sexual violence online.

[WeProtect Global Alliance](#) The internet was not created with children in mind and can be unsafe for children to explore. Every phone and computer is a potential gateway for offenders seeking to sexually exploit children. WeProtect Global Alliance generates political commitment and practical approaches to make the digital world safe and positive for children, preventing sexual abuse and long-term harm. Our Alliance's geographical reach is unprecedented: more than 103 countries are members along with 76 private sector companies, 121 civil society and 10 intergovernmental organisations. This diverse membership is key to our ability to deliver real change. Together, we break down complex problems and develop policies and solutions to protect children from sexual abuse online.

