

Government welcomes input on blocking porn and scams

THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER, Edward Natapei, today welcomed the discussion started by the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) about on-line porn, scams and violent games.

Speaking on behalf of Prime Minister Moana Carcasses - who is currently overseas and is the chairman of the National ICT (information and communications technologies) Development Committee - the acting prime minister stated, "I am very concerned about the issues raised by the VNCW and thank them for their input.

The internet will bring many benefits to Vanuatu, but it has a dark side too, and we must protect children and citizens from this dark side."

The acting prime minister noted the government has already been working on these issues.

"We want all citizens to be able to trust on-line material. To this end we have already taken a number of actions to address this problem," he said. "First, the newly adopted cyber-security policy has a child protection online working group to identify and evaluate technical measures in this area. The policy also requires each mobile operator to provide, upon request, a SIM card with restricted access to inappropriate services.

"Second, our excellent ICT regulatory body, the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR), has already discussed this

important issue twice over the last several months in meetings of its Consumer-Business Advisory Group. I understand that the VNCW has participated in this group and we look forward to the recommendations that the group and TRR bring forth on these matters.

"Third, TRR is already conducting awareness-raising activities, including the ICT debates in schools, presentations before youth and church groups, radio talk shows, and public meetings. TRR is working with the OGCIO (Office of the Government Chief Information Officer) to put on a child online protection strategic workshop in the next few months. TRR is also developing an internet industry code of practice, which is already at the stage of public consultations."

Fourth, he said the Government Broadband Network (GBN) has had filtering in place since it was built, which blocks access to porn sites, gaming sites and other sites which might distract civil servants from their missions. Our system also blocks almost all incoming "phishing," "spam" and other emails which try to lure people into clicking on links that might compromise their computers. We have recently upgraded our system with the help of a world-class expert and a software upgrade. So, we know this system works - but it does require effort and expertise.

Also and not the least, possession

or distribution of pornography is already a criminal offense under the penal code of Vanuatu."

The acting prime minister stated, "Currently the national cyber-security policy does not explicitly require the country-wide blocking of all sites with objectionable material.

"The government is open to discussion of this approach, and this may be the way to go. We noted that the article in the Daily Post on this topic urged that the British approach be used. Readers should be aware that the British approach, as actually proposed by PM David Cameron, is not a national uniform block. In practice the British approach will be a new screen presented to users which asks them if they want such material blocked, and the box will be pre-ticked with a 'yes.'"

The acting PM noted that many Internet Service Providers (ISPs), even in Britain, acknowledge that filters can be circumvented, and sometimes they 'over-block' or 'under-block' content or slow down download speeds. So this is not an easy area technically. That is why we want TRR and its experts to explore this area, study international best practices, consult with the VNCW, operators, other stakeholders and the public, and come up with a solution that is the best, fastest, cheapest and most effective for Vanuatu.

Mr Natapei highlighted an area of concern raised by the VNCW. "I am very glad that the VNCW is also worried about financial scams. I am, too. One of the most infamous scams in history was in Albania in the 1990s, where an isolated, naïve population was victimized by over 25 'Ponzi' or 'pyramid' schemes. Over two-thirds of the population invested in these terrible schemes, which promised a big payout in the future in exchange for a payment today to the scammer. Citizens lost over \$1.2 billion US dollars, about 100 billion vatu, in these schemes. The entire country was adversely affected."

The acting PM continued, "Given our somewhat naïve and isolated population, we must raise awareness about all forms of financial scams that use texting, internet, emails, face-to-face or other means. We can learn from Albania's experience."

"We thank all the numerous stakeholders who had a tremendous amount of input into the national ICT policy and national cyber-security policy.

"We think that discussion of ICT issues is healthy and we welcome input from all parties, especially groups like women who traditionally have been under-represented in decision making. We look forward to using ICTs to create a Just, Educated, Healthy and Wealthy Vanuatu.