

Home Secretary chairs virtual 'Five Eyes' security summit

Ministers from the 'Five Eyes' partnership all agreed to work together to tackle the increasing global threats caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in a virtual meeting co-chaired by Home Secretary Priti Patel today (Wednesday 17 June).

At the meeting of Home Affairs, Interior and Security Ministers from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US, they discussed a range of threats including the increased risk of online child sexual abuse, disinformation and hostile state activity.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

These are unprecedented times and now more than ever it is important we continue to work with our closest allies to protect our citizens.

I was pleased to speak with my 'Five Eyes' colleagues yesterday to discuss the shared threats we are facing and how we will work together to tackle them.

Ministers raised the persistent threat of hostile state activity as well as the spread of disinformation during the pandemic which is putting lives at risk. The nations agreed to share best practice and work together to counter these threats and ensure that the public can access reliable information to protect themselves.

The Home Secretary raised concerns about the increased risk to children online during the pandemic and welcomed the recent announcement by the Tech Coalition on tackling online child abuse. This builds on the Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, the landmark blueprint to keeping children safe online.

But the Five Country partners were clear that technology companies need to work quickly and go further to address the issues that continue to leave children vulnerable to predators online.

The Home Secretary said the threat of online child abuse and terrorism would increase if companies like Facebook continued with plans for end-to-end encryption across their platforms. Ministers agreed that tech companies should work closely with governments to ensure their plans do not damage efforts to keep the public safe.

Ministers also raised the issue of cyber criminals exploiting the pandemic through ransomware, malware and phishing attacks. Ministers agreed on the need to share intelligence around these kinds of scams and work closely to

stop them.

Ministers of the 'Five Eyes' nations agreed to continue to keep in regular contact during the pandemic and to meet in person for the next Five Country Ministerial event in New Zealand when possible.

Ministers in attendance were:

- Home Secretary Priti Patel (co-chair)
- New Zealand's Minister for Justice Andrew Little (co-chair)
- Australian Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton
- Canadian Minister for Public Safety Bill Blair
- US Attorney General William Barr
- US Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Ken Cuccinelli