

# New AI technique to block online child grooming launched

A new technique which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to identify and block child grooming conversations online has been launched by the Home Office and Microsoft in Seattle.

The technique, which began development at a hackathon co-hosted by Microsoft and the Home Office in November 2018, will automatically flag conversations which could be taking place between groomers and children, and pass on details of the flagged conversation to the relevant law enforcement agency.

The technique will be licensed from today (9 January), free of charge, to small and medium-sized technology companies to help them stamp out child grooming on their platforms.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Predators must get the message loud and clear, that there is no safe space to groom children for abuse.

We are committed to stamping out this vile crime and this technique is just one part of that. Through collaboration with international partners and industry we are leading a worldwide effort to keep children safe from abuse.

Minister for Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Online grooming of children is utterly sickening which is why it's vital to drive innovation to tackle this appalling crime.

The launch of this technology represents the culmination of months of hard work by those committed to keeping our children safe online.

Microsoft Chief Digital Safety Officer Courtney Gregoire said:

At Microsoft, we embrace a multi-stakeholder model to combatting online child exploitation that includes survivors and their advocates, government, tech companies, and civil society working together.

Today, we share a new technique – code name Project Artemis – to help prevent the online grooming of children for sexual purposes.

We invite other collaborators to embrace this technique, join the

fight, and support continuous improvement.

The prototype of the technique was developed in Seattle in 2018. Engineers from Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Snap and Twitter worked for two days analysing thousands of conversations to understand patterns used by predators.

Since then, engineers have worked through technical, legal and policy aspects, analysing thousands more instances of grooming conversations to develop the technique. The work was led by a cross industry group made up of Microsoft, The Meet Group, Roblox, Kik, Thorn and others.

This group was spearheaded by leading academic Dr Hany Farid who had previously worked to develop a tool which assisted in the detection, disruption and reporting of child exploitation images.

Licensing and adoption of the technique will be handled by Thorn, a charity that focuses on harnessing the power of technology to protect children online.

This tool is part of the UK government's work to tackle child sexual exploitation in all its forms. In July, the Home Secretary brought together counterparts from the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand at the Five Country Ministerial meeting in London to discuss how to tackle online child sexual abuse. Ministers agreed to collaborate on designing a set of voluntary principles that will ensure online platforms have the systems needed to stop the viewing and sharing of child sexual abuse material, the grooming of children online, and the livestreaming of child sexual abuse.

Other measures to stamp out online child abuse include £30m funding to target the most the most dangerous and sophisticated offenders on the dark web and upgrades to the Child Abuse Image Database. These include new tools to improve the capabilities of Police enabling them to rapidly analyse seized devices and identify victims.

The Home Office is also working with the Joint Security and Resilience Centre (JSaRC) to develop tools to identify and block livestreamed child sexual abuse and pledged £300,000 in May to further develop capabilities.

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## **PM call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine: 9 January 2020**

The Prime Minister spoke to President Zelenskyy of Ukraine this afternoon.

He offered his condolences to the President for the loss of the Ukraine

International Airlines plane and for all those who were on board.

President Zelenskyy updated the Prime Minister on Ukrainian efforts to establish the facts and the Prime Minister offered UK support.

The Prime Minister said that there needed to be a full, credible and transparent investigation into what happened.

The Prime Minister underlined the UK's continued commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and the leaders agreed to continue working together to strengthen the bilateral relationship between our two countries.

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## **PM call with Emir of Qatar: 9 January 2020**

The Prime Minister spoke to the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani this afternoon.

They discussed the situation in the region following the death of Qasem Soleimani and the Prime Minister reiterated the need for calm on all sides.

The Prime Minister underlined the UK's continued commitment to the JCPoA and to ongoing engagement to reduce tensions and find diplomatic solutions.

The two leaders discussed the importance of Coalition forces' continued presence in the region to tackle the shared threat from Daesh.

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## **Team of UK experts to help fight Australian bushfires**

A team of UK experts is travelling to Australia to scope how the UK can best contribute to the Australian response to the unprecedented bushfires causing devastation across the country.

As a first step in the UK's support for Australia, this team will include a senior member of the UK Fire and Rescue Service, a medical specialist in trauma and mental health, and a military liaison officer, specialising in crisis response.

They will work with Australian colleagues to establish what type, extent and

duration of support will be of most use to the emergency responders, and ensure that such contributions are fully integrated with Australian efforts.

These specialists will liaise with regional coordinators across a number of states as well as with the central Australian government.

This engagement will inform options for a future UK contribution, which would focus on areas of most pressing Australian need, including where the UK has world leading capabilities and expertise.

The deployment comes following exchanges between the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and their Australian counterparts.

On the deployment, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Australia is one of our strongest and oldest friends and we are utterly distraught about the devastation caused by these catastrophic bushfires – including the tragic loss of life and of precious biodiversity.

Despite being on opposite sides of the world, our bond is a close one, and we will do all that is possible to help them respond to and recover from this tragic situation.

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## [Preparing for elections and addressing root causes of conflict in West Africa](#)

May I join others in welcoming you to the chair and welcoming you and your other co-elected members of the Council. We look forward to working with you.

In the context of this briefing, we also welcome particularly the delegation in Niger. We know from last month that you have suffered first hand the consequences of violence in the region. You have our condolences for the losses to your armed forces.

It's also very good to see SRSB Chambas back in the chamber to brief us. We welcome the very productive role that UNOWAS has played in the region. In particular, we welcome the role that you play, sir, through your good offices. People don't always see the result of that work because it is, by its very nature, diplomatic and quiet. But we know it goes on and we know it makes a difference, so thank you to you and your team for that.

We're also very grateful to the Secretariat and Secretary-General for their report on the trends in the region. As others have said, these continue to be of significant concern, particularly on the security side, but also on the

humanitarian side. Because the security side is so bleak, the impact on the broader development opportunities in the region are also very affected.

We wanted to cover three areas today. The first is security and to talk about that in a little bit more detail. The second is elections, and we've heard a bit about that already today. And the third is to focus on the underlying causes of conflict and what we can do to address those once the security situation is addressed.

On the security and humanitarian side, as I said, we're continuing to be concerned about the damaging cycles of violence that we're seeing. And I think, Mr Chambas, you called them "unprecedented" and the spike between the year before last and what we saw last year was exponential. So a real cause for concern, particularly the deterioration in central Mali, an area where we're separately sees this council, and northern Burkina Faso, since the last report.

The increased violence is exacerbating an already perilous humanitarian situation, particularly in central Mali and Burkina Faso. The UK has just released a further 20 million pounds in additional humanitarian funding in the Sahel on top of the 50 million pounds we're already spending to help address this situation. I think we all need to think again about whether we're doing enough in this region to look at the humanitarian situation.

It's also worth just noting, as others have said, that we also need to ensure and states in the region need to ensure humanitarian access for those who do deliver that humanitarian response. We need to ensure that they're able to get to the regions they need to and given the protection they need, both legally and in security terms.

I think the main point is that security needs to be this council's principal focus. We cannot help those who urgently need assistance unless we can help the states that they are in to bring the security situation there under control.

Like many others in this chamber, we heard the African Union talk in the middle of December, when we last touched on this issue, about the variety of regional initiatives that we now have on the security front. And I wonder if one thing that this council might want to consider is whether we can help bring some coherence, to those to look at how we map those, look at whether the current issues we have are addressing the concerns that we have, whether they're duplicative or complementary. So, I just think that's something we can consider in due course in line with the African Union advice.

Turning now to elections, again, I think it's useful to hear that there has been progress in the region and there are some upsides over the last year on the political front and on the election front. We agree with the emphasis, Mr Chambas, you're placing on helping states deliver credible elections over this next period. And from our perspective, freedom of assembly and expression are essential to that, so we hope in particular you will send that message to states in the region. But in the context of the deteriorating security situation we've already touched on, we have to help states avoid

these elections becoming flash points of violence or enabling abuses of power, as this will only exacerbate conflicts and violence further. Citizens must be able to exercise their democratic rights to votes without fear of intimidation or retribution. We stand ready to do what we can with your advice to support those.

In terms of the underlying causes, the immediate humanitarian and security efforts to support the elections and the wider region are obviously critical, but we must also do what we can to address the root causes of these conflicts and violence. And I think one of the interesting things that we see in the report is that, in the countries themselves, there is a growing recognition of the need to address those underlying issues, but it's very difficult to do so in the absence of proper security that states can do something. They can work to address long-term governance issues by reducing abuses by security forces. We can help governments to build their legitimacy by providing inclusive and accountable basic services where they're able to do so – and that's something I think we should give more focus on. And it's good to see the report looking at giving UNOWAS the ability to help the UN in the region to think about the development assistance that it can provide when it can provide it. These kind of interventions will help build the foundations for stability that the region so desperately needs.

So, Mr Chambas, we thank you, we thank your team. This is an incredibly important region and you have a challenging year ahead, but you have our full support.

Thank you.