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Advert Targets Loopholes in Sex Offenders Register

A new cinema advert for the coalition to End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT UK) will be launched at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). The panel launching the ad will include television presenter Esther Rantzen, ECPAT Co-ordinator Helen Veitch, and the mother of the children abused by the real-life character depicted in the advertisement.

Under the Sex Offenders Act 1997, sex offenders who have committed crimes against children overseas can be prosecuted in the UK.

But two loopholes allow sex offenders to escape registration and consequently to operate outside the monitoring process of the Register of Sex Offenders, Part 1 of the 1997 Act. UK citizens who have been convicted overseas and return to the UK are not required to register, and convicted offenders do not have to notify the authorities of any intention to leave the UK or addresses overseas for holiday or abode.

The chilling ad made by award-winning director Tony Kaye, calls for the Register of Sex Offenders to be amended. The ad shows a travelling salesman invited into the home by a young mother. Her eight-year-old daughter is soon engaged in play by the salesman when the mother is out of the room, making tea.

The voiceover explains that the salesman was formerly a Lance Corporal in the Ordnance Corps, stationed in Germany, where he was found guilty in 1990 of raping, and leaving for dead, a young girl.

“Simply by moving country, he was able to leave his past behind,” says the ad, made by the agency D’Arcy which has raised all the funds for this, the second ECPAT advert. The first - made by another agency but the same creative team - ran in cinemas nation-wide several years ago and helped ECPAT, a coalition of sex of the UK’s major development and humanitarian agencies, achieve the aim of their campaign for extra-territorial legislation.

“ECPAT is campaigning to have the Register amended as the sexual exploitation of children is not an issue limited by national boundaries,” says Co-ordinator Helen Veitch. “The UK government has an obligation to protect children everywhere from sexual abuse, particularly when that abuse involves UK citizens.”

The ad is based on a true story. After serving four years of his sentence, the man involved was deported back to the UK, effectively a free man. And in the UK he abused again. In 1998 he was jailed for life after abducting and indecently assaulting two young sisters, aged ten and twelve, as they walked back home from their church.

“Before this tragedy happened to my family I read about stories of children being sexually abused by British men in countries like the Philippines and Brazil and they filled me with horror,” the mother of the two sisters will tell press at the launch. She will argue that children in developing countries also need to be protected from UK offenders travelling or living abroad.

“I want to channel the anger I feel about my children’s abuse into something positive. Children everywhere need the best protection we can offer. The Register of Sex Offenders needs changing now.”