

**OPENING SPEECH BY THE HON. EDWARD ZAMMIT LEWIS, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH, AT THE INSAFE CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY THE MALTA COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY – 11th SEPTEMBER 2013**

Ladies and Gentleman, distinguished guests, good morning.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this event and an honour for us to host organisations such as INSAFE and INHOPE, leading global brands and colleagues from other European countries to discuss what is, without a doubt, a very important theme – that of Online Safety.

It is an issue which Malta takes very seriously, particularly in view of the significant advances it has made with regard to the take-up of ICTs, which are now the norm in practically every home and workplace. Our children are at the forefront of ICT use, with at least 98% enjoying internet access at home and using it on a regular basis. In line with other countries, the use of social networks is also very popular, most common amongst teens. 90% of our youths aged between 13 and 14 years are avid users of social networks. Mobile data is on the rise, particularly amongst teens, with 56% having accessed the Internet via mobile phones.

Locally, the Safer Internet Programme has been successful in bringing together key entities to help our children enjoy a safe online experience. Parents and educators played a key role in achieving this. Such collaboration is essential in order to ensure the realisation of the ambitious goals the BeSmartOnline! project set out to achieve.

We consider the topics you will be discussing today as highly critical. Not simply because of children's vulnerability, which we must duly protect, but also because children are the foundations of tomorrow's society. We need to ensure that as a nation, we not only see ICTs as a tool for economic success, but also, as a means to reap the benefits of a better society for improved social cohesion and general well being. This principle applies to the rest of Europe. This can only be achieved if we are wise enough to preserve and develop good citizenship within the online world. We can only succeed in creating a better internet-enabled future if we are able to make our children exemplary online citizens who can mutually respect each other and who are willing to work together for the benefit of the community.

Despite the successes that have been achieved, it is no time for complacency. A case in point is the uptake and use of Facebook amongst younger age groups, with 72% of our 11 and 12 year olds having a Facebook profile – a direct violation of the terms of use. This is something that we are seeking to address in the short term.

In the context of an ever-more globalised world, where the Internet has blurred, if not erased, geographic boundaries, Government cannot work in isolation. Such efforts cannot be undertaken successfully if it were not for the collective and collaborative efforts of a number of institutions. I take this opportunity to commend joint efforts such as Insafe and INHOPE through which Europe has shown that a European reality needs a pan-European solution. I strongly encourage that past instruments devised to sustain such collaboration are preserved and enforced. After all, it is this collaboration that has made Europe a role model in addressing internet safety. In view of this, I am pleased to note the interest from industry players and their presence at this event. I hope that this training session serves to build

stronger relationships as well as strengthened skills to better equip children to deal with risks they may face online.

This is only the beginning as technology advancement continues to reshape the way we interact, learn, enjoy ourselves and raise our children. Our future is dependent on our children; let's jointly continue to work to ensure that they can shape this in as safe an environment as possible with the appropriate tools and abilities.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful day.