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PRESS STATEMENT

7ᵗʰ January 2019

ADVISORY BY THE COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY OF KENYA ON THE 'BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE'

The Communications Authority of Kenya (CA), through the National Computer Incident Response Team Coordination Centre (National KE-CIRT/CC), has received reports of the resurgence of the 'Blue Whale Challenge' in Kenya.

The Blue Whale Challenge is a hidden invite-only game, in which 'players' are recruited/invited through social media platforms or through the phone. The game, which targets vulnerable and young people, lasts for 50 days, during which time the game 'administrator' presents the 'player' with daily tasks. These tasks start with non-challenging assignments such as listening to certain genres of music or watching horror movies, after which the 'player' progresses to more challenging tasks such as staying up the whole night, mutilating themselves by carving the "whale" symbol on their arm, and finally, with the 'player' taking their own life.

Reports indicate that on starting the challenge, the 'administrator' infects the 'player's' mobile device or computer with malware and viruses, with the purpose of accessing the 'player's' personal information such as photos. If the participant refuses to complete their given tasks, the 'administrator' threatens to release, publish, share, and/or post the extremely personal or highly sensitive content. The game therefore takes advantage of the 'player's' vulnerability to blackmail them into the belief that there will be severe consequences for not fulfilling the orders of the 'administrator'.

Parents are requested to be on the lookout for the following signs that may suggest that your child may be taking part in the game, and advices parents to immediately seek help where they are concerned that their child may be participating in the Blue Whale Challenge:

   i.   Sleep deprivation
   ii. Checking their mobile devices more frequently
   iii. Self harming which they may be attempting to hide by wearing long sleeved and loose clothing
   iv. Increased and unusual time spent online chatting with strangers.

The Authority wishes to advice those who may have already fallen victim to the Blue Whale Challenge to immediately stop playing or completing the tasks given to them

by the 'administrator'. Furthermore, the Authority recommends talking to someone you can trust, preferably your parents or guardians, and contacting your local authorities.

To help protect children online, the Authority recommends that parents and guardians inform children and young people to observe the following cybersecurity guidelines:

1. Change privacy settings on online social media accounts to ensure that only you, your family and close friends can see it
2. Do not accept friend requests from people that you do not know
3. Do not accept phone calls from numbers that you do not recognize or calls from blocked/anonymous telephone numbers
4. Avoid over sharing, especially personal information, on social media
5. Do not talk to strangers online
6. Report social media posts with the following hash tag: #f57, #bluewhalechallenge, #curatorfindme, #i_am_whale,

The Blue Whale Challenge is a form of cyber bullying that is extremely concerning and dangerous as it targets young people who are more vulnerable and susceptible to persuasion. In this regard, the Authority requests the public to report any invitations to play the game to incidents@ke-cirt.go.ke or call +254 703 042700, +254 730-172700.

About National KE-CIRT/CC

The National Kenya Computer Incident Response Team - Coordination Centre (National KE-CIRT/CC) is a multi-agency collaboration framework which is responsible for the national coordination of cyber security as Kenya's national point of contact on cyber security matters. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Kenya Information and Communications Act, 1998.

The National KE-CIRT/CC detects, prevents and responds to various cyber threats targeted at the country on a 24/7 basis, and coordinates response to cyber security matters at the national level in collaboration with relevant actors locally and internationally.

Members of the public are advised to contact the National KE-CIRT/CC via the email address incidents@ke-cirt.go.ke or through the dedicated hotlines +254 703 042700, +254 730-172700 to report an incident or seek advice on cyber security.

Issued by,

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DIRECTOR-GENERAL