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## **Marking 25 Years of Fighting Child Exploitation, IJM Philippines Unveils Vision for Lasting Protection of Children**

PASIG CITY, PHILIPPINES – International Justice Mission (IJM) Philippines commemorated its 25th anniversary by reaffirming its mission to end online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) and casting a bold vision for building lasting protection for children.

The milestone was celebrated at the Manila Prayer Gathering held at Greenhills Christian Fellowship (GCF) in Ortigas Center, Pasig City. Hundreds of longtime and new supporters, survivor leaders, and allies came together in reflection and solidarity, witnessing the next phase in the fight against OSAEC—the launch of a survivor-led campaign designed to combat exploitation within communities.

“We recognize the incredible efforts of government and other stakeholders in strengthening protection for our children. The progress is undeniable—over a thousand victims rescued, and hundreds of perpetrators held accountable. I believe we are at an inflection point, with strong momentum to end OSAEC,” said IJM Philippines National Director Samson Inocencio at the gathering,

The U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Hero added: “How do we actually build protection for Filipino children from OSAEC and end this crime for good? At IJM, we work alongside partners in the government and the private sector, both at the national and local level, to take strategic actions to end online sexual abuse or exploitation of children: disrupt the threats, build lasting systems and strengthen local response.”

With the theme “*Behold, I am making all things new,*” and worship led by international Christian music ministry CityAlight, the Manila Prayer Gathering brought together faith leaders, government partners, survivor leaders, and supporters in a powerful expression of unity and shared commitment to protecting children. Through worship, testimonies, and prayer, the event highlighted the vital role of faith communities in advancing justice and sustaining protection efforts.

“The best way to predict the future is to create it. And everyone—the government, nongovernment organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector and communities as their special roles to play in creating a future where every child is safe and free from any form of abuse and exploitation,” said Department of Justice Assistant Secretary Michelle Anne Lapuz.

Since beginning operations in 2001, IJM Philippines has worked alongside the Philippine government to combat child sexual exploitation by holding perpetrators accountable, bringing survivors to safety and strengthening the justice system. In areas where IJM partnered with local authorities, studies showed declines in child sex trafficking prevalence ranging from 72% to 86%.

As the nature of exploitation evolved, IJM transitioned in 2016 to address OSAEC—a crime often occurring within homes and facilitated by technology.

Unlike traditional forms of trafficking, OSAEC typically takes place inside homes and is perpetrated by trusted adults, including parents, relatives, or neighbors. One of its most devastating forms is the livestreaming of child sexual abuse, where a child is exploited in real time in exchange for payment from offenders abroad.

The *Scale of Harm* study by IJM and the Nottingham Rights Lab found that in 2023, nearly half a million Filipino children—approximately one in every 100—were trafficked to produce child sexual exploitation material. The study also revealed that about a quarter of a million Filipino adults were involved in facilitating this form of exploitation.

Since 2011, IJM has supported the rescue of more than 1,700 victims and children at risk, the arrest of at least 464 suspects, and the conviction of at least 295 perpetrators.

### **Survivor Leadership at the Center**

IJM's commemoration of 25 years of combating child exploitation also marked the launch of *Hope U Protect*, a survivor-led campaign spearheaded by the Philippine Survivor Network (PSN). This initiative signals a new phase in the movement to end online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC).

Led by adult survivors of child sexual exploitation, the *Hope U Protect* campaign works to teach children how to recognize safe and unsafe situations and where to seek help; support parents and communities in guiding and protecting children; and partner with local governments to pass and enforce anti-OSAEC ordinances.

"To every parent, teacher, church leader, youth leader, barangay leader, and community member here today—your role matters," said survivor leader Patricia. "You do not need to be an expert to protect a child. You only need to care enough to listen, to notice, to speak up, and to take action. To my fellow survivors—your voice matters. Your story matters. Your courage is already bringing hope."

Launched in support of the national vision *Bayang Walang Bahid ng OSAEC*, introduced by IJM and the Philippine government in 2024, *Hope U Protect* places survivors at the forefront of advocacy and community action—empowering them to transform social norms, encourage reporting, and drive lasting protection at the grassroots level.

### **Looking Ahead: The Work Continues**

Reflecting on IJM's 25-year journey, Inocencio expressed deep gratitude to partners in government, the church, civil society organizations, survivor leaders, and the private sector for both the victories achieved and the important work that still lies ahead.

He shared, "I have deep confidence that if we do this together, we can restore our home—the Philippines—so that every child can be safe within it." ###

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## **About IJM**

International Justice Mission is a global organization that protects people in poverty from violence. IJM partners with local authorities in 33 communities in 18 countries to rescue and restore survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and help strengthen public justice systems so they can better protect people from violence. Our work in the Philippines led to a dramatic decrease in the prevalence of sex trafficking of children in bars and brothels-reductions ranging from 72%-86% in the cities where we partnered with local authorities. In 2016, IJM fully transitioned our program in the Philippines to combat online sexual exploitation of children, in particular the trafficking of children to create new child sexual abuse materials, including via livestreaming.

Learn more: <https://www.ijm.org.ph>