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April 26, 2024

IJM Proposes Steps Following Philippine President’s Directive to Combat Online Child Exploitation

MANILA, PHILIPPINES – International Justice Mission has recommended concrete steps as it expressed support for President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.’s directive to step up efforts against online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) in the Philippines.

“The alarming prevalence of trafficking of children to produce child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSAEM)—with nearly half a million Filipino children estimated to be victimized in 2022 alone—demands urgent and comprehensive action, and we commend the government’s commitment to addressing this huge problem,” said lawyer Samson Inocencio Jr., national director of IJM Philippines and vice president of IJM’s Program Against Online Sexual Exploitation of children.

IJM, which released the [Scale of Harm](#) prevalence study in September last year, supports President Marcos’ directive to heighten law enforcement to rescue victims, arrest and prosecute perpetrators, and to implement a holistic solution. IJM further suggested that the following actions be taken to accelerate the fight against OSAEC:

- Strict enforcement of the Anti-OSAEC law provisions requiring tech companies to detect, block and report CSAEM, including livestreamed abuse;
- Issuance of clear guidance and regulation from the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to ensure Philippine banks and money transfer businesses detect, intercept and report transactions indicative of OSAEC;
- Issuance of clear guidance from the Supreme Court for prosecutors and courts to consistently apply the probable cause and police personal knowledge principles in a way that allows law enforcement to quickly secure warrants.

Inocencio said significant progress has been made in addressing OSAEC, with collaborative efforts led by the Philippine Government resulting in more perpetrators being held accountable and more victims brought to safety.

“However, there is still much more that the government and other stakeholders can do to end this horrible problem affecting Filipino children. IJM undertook the Scale of Harm prevalence study and released the findings last year, with the aim of helping stakeholders understand the magnitude of the crime and develop appropriate responses. We are pleased to continue working with the government to increase community reporting and strengthen the response of the criminal justice system, among other recommendations outlined in our study,” he continued.

In 2023, the Philippines received [2,740.905 reports](#) from the U.S. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) of suspected child sexual exploitation online. The vast majority of those cases likely remained unacted upon, with offenders continuing to exploit vulnerable children.

In order to streamline and intensify Philippine law enforcement investigations and operations against OSAEC, IJM recommends that the Supreme Court give clear guidance enabling prosecutors and courts to consistently interpret and apply the legal principles of probable cause and police personal knowledge in a way that allows law enforcement to quickly secure warrants and arrest suspected traffickers and sex offenders, while rescuing victims.

IJM noted that some prosecutors and courts currently demand an exacting amount of evidence from the police simply to secure a Warrant to Seize and Examine Computer Data (WSSECD) as part of investigations. For instance, law enforcement who are armed with referrals from foreign counterparts or NCMEC that contain CSAEM along with information about the suspect—in other words, law enforcement who have personal knowledge of CSAEM—are still being denied WSSECD or not even applying because of heightened legal expectations that they should engage with every suspect online and gather more evidence first.

Recognizing the pivotal role of the financial sector, IJM also urged the AMLC and the BSP to provide explicit guidance and prescriptive regulation to Philippine banks and money transfer businesses about recognizing suspicious transactions related to OSAEC.

The financial sector should then monitor, using OSAEC-specific methodologies, incoming transactions and report any suspicious activity to the AMLC within 2 days. The AMLC then proactively shares this information with Philippine and foreign law enforcement agencies, including the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center, to aid law enforcement interventions against traffickers and sex offenders in the Philippines.

IJM also called on government regulators to fully enforce the Philippine Anti-OSAEC law requiring tech companies to “install mechanisms or measures designed to prevent, detect, respond or report” child sexual abuse and exploitation material and “install available technology, program, or software to ensure that access to or streaming of violations of this Act will be removed, blocked, or filtered.”

IJM urged the Philippine Government to demand all tech companies operating live video platforms or services, such as video-chats, in the country to make their platforms safe by design to detect, report, and block livestreamed child sexual abuse and the sharing of new images and videos of child sexual abuse.

“IJM is committed to continuing our partnership with the Philippine Government in urgent efforts to intensify the fight to protect Filipino children from horrific sexual abuse and exploitation, until all Filipino children are safe and protected,” Inocencio said.

To date, IJM has supported Philippine authorities in bringing close to 1,300 victims and children-at-risk to safety and arresting close to 400 suspected perpetrators, more than 230 of whom have been already convicted.

To report information about online child sexual exploitation, contact the Philippine National Police – Women and Children Protection Center at 0966-725-5961 (Globe) and 0919-777-7377 (Smart). ###

Note to Editors:

The Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Luxembourg Guidelines, prescribes the use of the term “child sexual abuse material” or “child sexual exploitation material” instead of “child pornography”. Sexualized material that depicts or otherwise represents children is a representation, and a form, of child sexual abuse and should not be described as “pornography.”

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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 31 communities in 16 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: IJM.org.ph