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## **Unified Front Against OSAEC: Philippine leaders join forces to protect children**

MANILA, PHILIPPINES – A national summit centered on combating online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) was held on September 16, 2024, bringing together leaders from the Philippine national government, local government units (LGUs), and various organizations to unite and strengthen efforts to increase community reporting of these crimes.

International Justice Mission (IJM), in partnership with the Department of Justice - Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (DOJ - IACAT) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), organized the "*Iisang Nasyon, Iisang Aksyon: Tapusin ang OSAEC Ngayon*" summit which saw the launch of a new national campaign to combat cultural norms that hinder proactive reporting of OSAEC in the communities.

His Excellency, Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., President of the Republic of the Philippines, graced the summit and made a strong warning to potential offenders: “Everyone should think not only twice, but three, but four, five, ten, one hundred times, before committing this abuse [OSAEC]. I have said it before, and I will say it again: this Administration will do everything. We will spare no effort to combat these heinous crimes against our children.”

Held at the New World Makati Hotel, Manila, the summit was organized in alignment with the President’s recent directive calling for intensified efforts against OSAEC. He has mandated increased law enforcement activities aimed at rescuing victims, arresting and prosecuting offenders, and implementing a whole-of-nation approach to combat OSAEC.

In 2022 alone, nearly half a million Filipino children, or roughly 1 in 100 children, were trafficked to produce child sexual exploitation material for profit, according to estimates from the pioneering *Scale of Harm* prevalence study by International Justice Mission (IJM) and the University of Nottingham Rights Lab.

IJM Philippines National Director Samson Inocencio Jr., an Anti-Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Hero Awardee by the U.S. State Department this year, commended the Philippine government and its partners for maintaining the Philippines’ Tier 1 ranking for the ninth consecutive year in the U.S. TIP Report. To maintain a Tier 1 status, governments must demonstrate continued progress each year in combating trafficking.

“While we still have much work to do to protect our children abused each year from OSAEC, with this proven track record in our fight against human trafficking, I am confident that we are on the path to establishing the world’s best response to OSAEC. Philippines truly is leading the world in implementing a research-based protection model for ending this crime and protecting children – and I do believe we are showing the world how to end OSAEC so that all children can be protected,” Inocencio said.

The summit also encouraged key stakeholders, especially local government units, to participate in the “*Bayang Walang Bahid ng OSAEC*” campaign to educate communities about the impact of OSAEC and the importance of reporting these heinous acts to authorities.

At the summit, key leaders from national government agencies and the city government of Iligan spoke during panel discussions centered on the President’s key mandates in combating OSAEC, including referral pathways, capacity-building, the Barangay IACAT initiative, local ordinances, and survivor support.

“The President’s directive to all national government agencies and local government units is clear: child safety must be paramount in all governmental initiatives and regulations. *Kaya itong ginagawa nating* national summit *ngayon ay isang napagandang* avenue *para kumilos tayo bilang iisang nasyon sa iisang aksiyon para tapusin ang OSAEC ngayon*. This event is a call to action for us here to take meaningful and tangible steps toward our unified quest of addressing OSAEC. We can win this cause through a four-pronged approach: intensified law enforcement, empowered communities, collaboration across all sectors, and care for victims,” said DILG Secretary Benjamin Abalos.

Addressing the summit crowd, Philippine Survivor Network Chairperson Charito (pseudonym) enumerated actions she and other survivors hope the government and other stakeholders would prioritize: “First, we want protection for the victims, for safe spaces, for agencies to be trauma-informed. Second, we need justice and convictions to be served. Third, we call on communities to have *pakabana or malasakit* sa mga *nahitabo* sa palibot (care for what’s happening around them). Intensify the education of the local officials about OSAEC and, if possible, put up an OSAEC desk in every LGU. Lastly, mayors should provide intentional investment for the sustainability of survivors by providing scholarships and financial support for activities that are critical to our healing and restoration.”

At the Summit, an exhibit was also set up to showcase photos and pottery created by members of the Philippine Survivor Network through Project BRACE (Building Resilience and Agency through Crafts and Expressive Arts). Supported by the Austrian Embassy Manila’s “South-North Embassy Projects: Culture and Development” grant, these workshops empower survivors to explore their creativity and share their stories through art.

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

## **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>