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PRESS STATEMENT

KUALA LUMPUR (13 JANUARY 2022) - The Children’s Commissioner (CC), Prof. Dato’ Noor Aziah Mohd Awal is saddened with the recent news report on January 10, 2022, which featured several students from Sekolah Kebangsaan Sibuga Besar in Sandakan crossing a dilapidated suspension bridge on their first day of school.

The report further affirms the CC’s discovery during a recent monitoring visit in Sandakan that children living in deeper remote areas and those without documentation face difficulties in accessing proper mainstream education. The CC commends the action of the Sandakan Town Council and the Implementation Coordination Unit, Prime Minister’s Department, for their coordinated and swift plans to assess the bridge for repair or reconstruction and hopes that such efforts will be expedited further. With the announced closure of the bridge, the CC also hopes that alternative measures, such as the provision of free-of-charge boats, will be implemented to assist children in attending schools. The CC further hopes that the Government, through Public Works Department, will continually inspect and ensure roads and bridges, infrastructure and public facilities under its purview and functions are safe, in good working condition and well-maintained at all times, as such facilities involve public and children’s lives and safety. Assessment and reconstruction efforts should not only be a reactive measure but must be proactive.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted children’s learning and well-being for almost two years and schools were closed during the enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO). With the reopening of schools, the CC implores for all relevant government agencies such as the Department of Education to ensure that all children, especially in rural areas are able to access education, by providing them with the necessary aids including transportation and an enabling school environment which ensures their safety and security.

The right of children to education is internationally recognised under the Article 28(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Fundamental to this right is the need under Article 28(1)(c) for States to implement measures that encourage regular attendance in school and to decrease drop-out rates. The importance of education is further in emphasised in Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which highlights the need for States to ensure equitable education for all. While Malaysia has continued to maintain its reservation to the Article 28(1)(a) of the CRC on the obligation of States to provide free and compulsory primary education, access to education should nonetheless be a priority in its pursuit of accelerated development.
The CC wishes to reiterate the need for the Government to increase its allocations for improving children’s access to education. Transparent reporting on the use of the budget for that purpose must also be available. Providing schools alone would not suffice. Access to schools should also be made a priority. With the two, the CC is confident that Malaysia will be able to further align itself towards achieving the goals of both the CRC and the SDGs.

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Professor Dato' Noor Aziah Hj. Mohd Awal, Children’s Commissioner
13 January 2022

Media queries: Contact Mrs. Norashikin Hamzah at 03-2612 5687 / 019-621 5336 or shikin@suhakam.org.my