



## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

### **CHILDREN EXPLOITED ONLINE FOR TERRORISM SHOULD NOT BE DETAINED UNDER SOSMA BUT PROVIDED APPROPRIATE PROTECTION AND INTERVENTION**

**KUALA LUMPUR (15 MARCH 2026)** – The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Children’s Rights (APPGM-CR), and all the CSO working on children’s rights strongly condemn the recent use of the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA) by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) to detain children who are victims of terrorist recruitment through social media and online gaming platforms.

There is growing international concern that terrorist groups are increasingly exploiting digital spaces and online gaming platforms to recruit and indoctrinate children. These tactics are evolving rapidly and often outpace the responses of governments. In such circumstances, the children involved are primarily victims of manipulation, grooming, and indoctrination, and should therefore be addressed through protection, rehabilitation, and psychosocial intervention, rather than restrictive security detention.

While we welcome the reported release of the children involved on the 13th of March 2026, it is essential that any further action prioritizes structured rehabilitation and monitoring mechanisms, particularly in cases where children may have been subjected to attempted online extremist recruitment. Detaining children under SOSMA, a law designed to address serious national security threats, is inconsistent with the principle of the best interests of the child and undermines Malaysia’s obligation to protect children from exploitation. The use of SOSMA against children raises serious concerns, as the procedural law does not provide child-specific safeguards, adequate judicial oversight, or protections consistent with the child justice system, particularly in cases involving national security offences.

As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) since 1995, Malaysia has clear international obligations to ensure that children are protected from arbitrary or prolonged deprivation of liberty. The justice system must also ensure that children’s treatment prioritizes the best interests of the child, due process, and meaningful access to justice.

The Child Act 2001 provides a clear legal framework that prioritises the care, protection, rehabilitation and welfare of children exposed to harm, exploitation or criminal influence. Children who have been targeted by extremist networks should therefore be addressed through child protection mechanisms, including counselling, deradicalisation programmes, family support and community-based rehabilitation. Such interventions should incorporate

appropriate psychosocial support, structured monitoring and active parental involvement to reduce the risk of recurrence. Deradicalisation initiatives must also be designed to include child-sensitive and age-appropriate modules that take into account the developmental needs, vulnerabilities and best interests of the child.

SUHAKAM and APPGM-CR therefore call upon the Prime Minister of Malaysia to:

- i. Immediately impose a moratorium on the use of SOSMA against children;
- ii. Ensure that children involved in such cases are treated as victims of exploitation and provided appropriate rehabilitation and protection under the Child Act 2001; and
- iii. Repeal SOSMA or amend the procedural law to introduce judicial oversight and safeguards that prevent its application arbitrarily by the upcoming July Parliamentary sitting.

Malaysia must adopt a child-centered and rights-based approach in responding to emerging threats of online extremist recruitment. Protecting children from terrorist exploitation requires strong child protection systems, early intervention, and rehabilitation, not prolonged security detention.

SUHAKAM and APPGM-CR remain committed to working with the Government and the enforcement agencies to ensure that Malaysia's counter-terrorism measures uphold human rights and protect the best interests of every child.

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**Issued jointly by:**

Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (SUHAKAM)

All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia Children's Rights (APPGM-CR)

**Endorsed by:**

Initiative to Promote Tolerance & Prevent Violence (INITIATE.MY)

Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)

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