

EDITOR, NEWS DESK

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**THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONERS EXPRESS DEEPEST CONDOLENCES ON
THE TRAGIC LOSS OF IRENE SOFIYA IN BATU PAHAT: CALL FOR RESPECT
FOR POLICE INVESTIGATIONS AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL
SAFEGUARDING REFORMS**

KUALA LUMPUR (6 OCTOBER 2026) - The Children's Commissioners (CC), Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), express its deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the family of young Irene Sofiya following her tragic passing in Batu Pahat, Johor. The loss of a young life is a devastating tragedy, and our thoughts and prayers are with her bereaved family and loved ones during this painful time.

The CC urge members of the public, media organisations, and social media users to grant the family privacy, dignity, and space necessary to grieve. We strongly appeal to all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from publishing intrusive media reports, sharing distressing images, or circulating unverified claims.

Respect for Ongoing Criminal Investigations

The CC acknowledge the swift response of the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) in initiating a comprehensive investigation into the incident. The CC strictly refrain from prejudging the circumstances, motives, or specific factors surrounding this tragedy, including unverified reports regarding potential bullying and urges the public to avoid speculation, premature online accusations, or "trial by media."

Where children may be involved in any capacity whether as witnesses, affected peers, or individuals under investigation, the preservation of procedural fairness and due process is paramount. In alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Child Act 2001 [Act 611], the rights, privacy, dignity, and presumption of innocence of all children must be strictly safeguarded. Protecting the legal rights and confidentiality of children under investigation in no way diminishes the severity of the loss, nor does it preclude accountability in accordance with the law.

Distinguishing Criminal Justice from Institutional Safeguarding

While Royal Malaysian Police's ongoing criminal investigation must establish the facts and determine criminal responsibility, the CC highlight the critical need to address broader institutional safeguarding in educational environments.

The CC emphasize that a criminal investigation by law enforcement and an institutional safeguarding review by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) are two distinct but complementary processes:

1. **The RMP Investigation:** Focuses on establishing facts, collecting evidence, and identifying criminal culpability under the relevant statutes.
2. **The MOE Safeguarding Review:** Examines administrative frameworks, supervision protocols, risk management strategies, and physical safety measures to identify systemic gaps and prevent future tragedies.

Raising these broader systemic questions is essential for preventive risk management and does not imply or constitute a finding of institutional failure in this specific case.

Strengthening School Safeguarding, Student Accountability, and After-School Protocols

Every child has an inherent right to an education in a safe, secure, and protective environment. School safety must extend beyond basic disciplinary rules to encompass a proactive, child-centred safeguarding culture.

To enhance child protection frameworks across all schools, the CC recommend that MOE consider the following concrete measures:

- **Robust Student Accountability Frameworks:** Moving beyond standard morning attendance-taking to establish robust check-out and handover procedures. Schools must maintain clear oversight of student presence during extra classes, co-curricular sessions, sports training, and late afternoon activities.
- **Standardised Missing Student Escalation Protocols:** Developing clear, time-sensitive escalation guidelines that define immediate search parameters, designate staff coordination roles, specify parental and administrative notification timelines, and set out clear thresholds for escalating matters to RMP.
- **Targeted After-School Risk Assessments:** Conducting comprehensive risk evaluations specifically tailored to activities taking place outside regular school hours, taking into account lower staffing levels, movement across school grounds, and isolated or under-supervised areas.
- **Systemic Safeguarding Audits:** Executing nationwide school safeguarding audits—moving beyond conventional security checks—to evaluate student movement, reporting mechanisms, physical facility blind spots, and overall staff safeguarding awareness.
- **Immediate Nationwide Familiarisation with Child Protection Policies:** Implement immediate, nationwide familiarisation programmes across all schools to ensure that students understand the school's child protection policy, their rights to safety and protection, how to recognise and report bullying, abuse, harassment, and other safeguarding concerns, and where to seek help.

Trauma-Informed Support and Child Participation

The psychological impact of a tragedy of this nature on classmates, friends, and the broader school community requires immediate and compassionate attention. The CC call upon MOE and relevant state agencies to deploy trauma-informed psychosocial support services to assist affected children and educators. Any interaction with child witnesses must prioritize emotional safety, avoid unnecessary repeated questioning, and be conducted using child-sensitive approaches.

Furthermore, children should be recognized as active partners in their own safety. Reporting channels within schools must be rendered accessible, trusted, confidential, and child-friendly, ensuring that students know where to turn when they feel unsafe or notice warning signs in their peers.

As the International Day of the Girl Child is observed annually on 11 October, this tragedy is a painful reminder that our commitment to girls' rights must extend beyond words and observances to real and meaningful change. Every girl has the right to learn, grow and pursue her future in safety and with dignity. Honouring girls' rights means building a society where no girl loses her life simply because she went to school, and where every school is a place in which children are protected from harm.



**MEDIA STATEMENT
THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA (SUHAKAM)**

This heartbreaking incident must serve as a catalyst for meaningful, sustained, and nationwide institutional reform. Protecting our children requires unwavering commitment, clear lines of accountability, and proactive safeguarding frameworks across every learning environment in Malaysia. The CC remain steadfast in its mandate to advocate for the rights, protection, and best interests of all children, and stand ready to collaborate with MOE, RMP, and civil society to strengthen child protection mechanisms across the nation.

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**CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONERS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA (SUHAKAM)
6 OCTOBER 2026**