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

EDITOR, NEWS DESK **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONERS CALL FOR STRONGER SAFEGUARDING MEASURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE IN SCHOOLS

KUALA LUMPUR (27 NOVEMBER 2026) - The Children's Commissioners (CC) of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) notes with serious concern over the reported conviction and sentencing of a primary school teacher in Sri Aman, Sarawak, to 60 years' imprisonment and 160 strokes of the cane in connection with 64 sexual offence charges involving eight children aged between seven and 12 years. The offences were reportedly committed under the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 [Act 792] and the Penal Code.

The CC recognise the importance of accountability and appropriate punishment for perpetrators of sexual offences against children. However, child protection cannot rely solely on criminal justice measures after abuse has occurred. Greater emphasis must be placed on prevention, early identification and institutional safeguarding, particularly in educational settings where teachers and other personnel occupy positions of trust and authority. Schools must provide a safe and supportive environment where children are protected from sexual abuse, grooming, exploitation, violence and all other forms of harm.

In this regard, the CC call on the Ministry of Education (MOE) to strengthen due diligence in the recruitment, appointment, placement, transfer and continued service of teachers and other personnel who have direct access to children. This should include mandatory background screening prior to appointment, comprehensive checks for records of offences against children, and periodic or risk-based re-screening throughout their service.

As part of these safeguarding measures, the CC recommend that the MOE systematically utilise the existing child sexual offender screening mechanism maintained by the Department of Children's Development (DCD). This mechanism enables organisations responsible for the care and supervision of children to conduct checks for records of sexual offences against children, thereby reducing the risk of convicted offenders being placed in positions of trust.

The CC further call on the DCD to expand the scope of the existing registry and screening mechanism beyond sexual offences to encompass other offences against children, in line with the legislative intent of section 118 of the Child Act 2001 [Act 611]. These should include offences involving physical abuse, neglect, maltreatment, exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence that pose significant risks to the safety and well-being of children.

Any expansion of the registry must be undertaken within a clear legal framework that upholds due process, proportionality, privacy and the presumption of innocence. Inclusion in the registry or adverse action arising from screening should not be based solely on allegations or unsubstantiated complaints.

The CC also recommend that the MOE make structured training on the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 [Act 792] mandatory for all teachers, both in-service and pre-service, within one year from the issuance of this statement. The training should be implemented systematically to establish a consistent minimum standard of knowledge and competency among educators, regardless of their length of service or stage of professional training.

Such training should equip educators with the knowledge and skills to recognise signs of sexual abuse and exploitation, identify grooming and manipulative behaviour, maintain appropriate professional boundaries, understand offences under Act 792, fulfil their reporting obligations and respond appropriately to disclosures of abuse. It should also incorporate child-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches to ensure that affected children are treated with dignity and protected from stigmatisation, retaliation and further harm.

The CC emphasise that effective child safeguarding requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach encompassing background screening, capacity-building, early identification, accessible reporting mechanisms, institutional accountability and continuous monitoring. To this end, the CC urge closer collaboration between the MOE, DCD, schools, law enforcement agencies and other relevant stakeholders.

The CC call for a decisive shift from a predominantly reactive approach towards a robust preventive child safeguarding system that places the best interests, safety, dignity and rights of every child at its centre. Every child has the right to learn, grow and develop in an environment free from violence, abuse and exploitation. Educational institutions must uphold their responsibility to ensure that this right is effectively protected.

-END-

Children's Commissioners (CC)
Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
27 November 2026