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International Justice Mission and U.S. State Department conclude project supporting survivors of online sexual exploitation

MANILA, PHILIPPINES – Stakeholders celebrated the successful conclusion of the “A Strong Network of Care” project by International Justice Mission (IJM) and the U.S. State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

The project was launched in August 2021 to build the capacity of a Philippine network of social services in providing a comprehensive and trauma-informed care for survivors of online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), empowering them towards healthy reintegration.

Over the course of two years, the project achieved significant milestones, including training 236 social workers and mental health providers in trauma-informed care. Through the project, 30 OSEC survivors in Mindanao received crucial mental health services. Additionally, 10 survivors from Mindanao received foster and kinship care from trained providers.

“You have demonstrated that the work of combating online sexual exploitation of children is not solely a two-year endeavor, but a long-term commitment that we must all remain committed to,” said Jamie Sutter, International Program Officer, EAP, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, addressing project partners during a close-out ceremony held on April 26, 2023. “It is not an easy task, especially because the project began in the middle of the global COVID pandemic, and I commend your dedication and resilience against such challenging and unprecedented factors to ensure the project stayed on track. Thank you for joining us today and we look forward to continuing our work to fight human trafficking, protect children, and ensure survivors receive the care that they need for sustained recovery.”

Funded by a grant from the U.S. State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, the project was implemented by IJM in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Child Protection Network (CPN), and the Parenting Foundation of the Philippines (PFP). The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) also supported the project.

Other key project accomplishments were as follows:

- 30 practitioners trained in Trauma-Informed Psychosocial Processing
- 20 individuals trained in foster and kinship care
- 34 social workers trained in managing foster and kinship care
- Reintegration plans developed for 33 survivors
- Developed networks of care in five regions and conducted strategic planning for four regions

- 167 members of the network of care trained in providing trauma-informed services
- 10 local government units passed and implemented local ordinances against OSEC
- Launched Philippine Survivor Network (PSN) on February 7, 2023
- Conducted first PSN General Assembly in March 2023
- 39 survivors participated in the training, “Advocacy and the Power of Story”
- Established the Mindanao Foster Care Working Group.

“The fight against OSAEC (online sexual abuse and exploitation of children) is not a fight of any single organization. We must take a proactive stance and protect our children’s welfare vigorously. The DSWD and all partner agencies cannot do this alone. All the help from all sectors of our society is vital. Through collective, multi-sectoral, and multi-level action, we will create a sense of hope for this generation whose salvation lies in our actions. Let us not fail our children who are counting their faith in each one of us,” said DSWD Secretary Rexlon Gatchalian.

Lawyer Samson Inocencio Jr., Vice President and National Director of IJM OSEC Program, said: “The success of the A Strong Network of Care project is a huge milestone in IJM's efforts to combat online sexual exploitation of children in the Philippines. The project has enhanced the capacity of the country’s network of social services to provide a comprehensive and trauma-informed response that meets the individual needs of OSEC survivors. We are grateful to the U.S. State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons for investing in survivor care. IJM remains committed to protecting children from this heinous crime and ensuring that survivors receive the support they need to live a life free from exploitation.”

Charito (real name withheld), chairperson of the Philippine Survivor Network said: “I am grateful for the project because it has given us, survivors, a community to support one another in our healing journey and our advocacy. Through the project, we have received training and skills that have empowered us to become advocates and leaders in our own right. Survivor-advocates will continue to work together towards a world where no child is ever subjected to the horrors of sexual exploitation.”

During the two-year project, stakeholders have organized themselves into a strong network with clear protocols and policies supporting survivor empowerment.

While the project comes to an end, the stakeholders, including government and civil society members, are committed to continuing their efforts in implementing laws protecting children and providing programs and services to survivors.

To date, IJM has supported Philippine authorities in the conviction of 191 people for offenses related to the online sexual exploitation of children. IJM has also supported 329 operations, resulting in the rescue of 1,100 victims.

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

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ABOUT INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

International Justice Mission (IJM) is a global organization that protects people in poverty from violence. IJM works with local authorities and governments to rescue and restore survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and help strengthen public justice systems so they can better protect people from violence. Its 21 years of 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 it partnered with local authorities. In 2016, IJM fully transitioned its 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. As of April 19, 2023, IJM has assisted Philippine authorities in 331 operations, leading to the rescue of 1,111 victims and arrest of 347 suspects of online sexual exploitation of children (first case dates to 2011). For more information about IJM's work combating the online sexual exploitation of children, visit osec.ijm.org.