

Filipinos urged to unite to protect children from online sexual abuse and exploitation

The government, the private sector and everyday citizens must unite and work together in order to protect the Filipino children from the grave threat of online sexual abuse and exploitation.

This was the main call Thursday (May 18) during the official launch of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for Republic Act No. 11930, also known as the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and the Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act.

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian described the signing of the IRR as “a meaningful journey towards enhancing the protection of children against online abuse.”

“The DSWD, as one of the signatories of the IRR, will remain vigilant in making sure that the provisions will be strictly implemented and never abused. Likewise, the Department will continue to craft relevant plans, policies, and programs to address the evolving need for better protection, recovery, and reintegration of victim-survivors,” Secretary Gatchalian said in his message.

Department of Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla pointed out that the Philippines remains a prime target for online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, owing to factors such as poverty, fluency in English and widespread internet access.

“It is the responsibility of all, from the government to everyday citizens, to protect the innocence and well-being of

our future: the Filipino children,” Secretary Remulla said.

According to the Child Rights Network, the launch of the IRR heralds a groundbreaking milestone in the Philippine battle against OSAEC.

“Data shows an alarming surge in OSAEC-related reports, particularly at the height of the pandemic. This alarming trend is supported by the findings of the Anti-Money Laundering Council, which documented a significant rise in suspicious financial transactions linked to online sexual abuse,” Mr. Romeo Dongeto, Convenor of the Child Rights Network, said.

“We are pleased to witness the Philippine government prioritizing this urgent matter. They have actively engaged civil society, the private sector, and even children themselves in shaping how the law will be enforced,” Dongeto pointed out in his message.

The IRR of the Anti-OSAEC law launched on Wednesday (May 17) outlines comprehensive guidelines and mechanisms to combat OSAEC, ranging from effective reporting to robust international cooperation.

The IRR also establishes the National Coordination Center against OSAEC and CSAEM (NCC-OSAEC-CSAEM) under the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT). This center will be responsible for developing programs to address OSAEC and CSAEM.

A modern law for a modern crisis

For her part, Senator Risa Hontiveros, main author and sponsor of the Anti-OSAEC Law in the Senate, said the Philippines has created a comprehensive legislation and an IRR that reflect the invaluable input obtained through a nationwide consultation, making it “a true landmark in our legal framework.”

“We can proudly proclaim that we have crafted a holistic legislation that assigns responsibility to every sector – from law enforcement to the private sector. This modern law and its corresponding IRR directly tackle the complexities of our modern world,” Senator Hontiveros said.

The IRR covers the duties and responsibilities of the private sector, especially internet intermediaries and internet service providers, down to internet hotspots, cafes, or kiosks.

The IRR also lists key instrumentalities in fighting OSAEC, including financial investigation of perpetrators, blacklisting of aliens, and age verification protocols.

As provided in RA 11930, an OSAEC and CSAEM Offenders Registry for Filipino nationals and foreigners will also be created.

Rule III of the IRR also delineates how the Philippines can exercise jurisdiction over OSAEC offenses, even if committed outside the Philippines. It also clarifies how international legal cooperation on OSAEC cases can be achieved.

UNICEF Representative to the Philippines Oyunsaikhan Dendevnorov also lauded the newly-launched IRR, calling the document a “reflection of our aspirations for the Filipino children.”

“It stands as a testament to our unwavering commitment to create a safer and more secure future for every Filipino child, be it in online or offline spaces,” the UNICEF representative said.

RA 11930 is a consolidation of Senate Bill No. 2209 – primarily authored by Sen. Hontiveros, and House Bill No. 10703 – primarily authored by Rep. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla and sponsored by House on the Welfare of Children Chairperson Rep. Yedda Romualdez.

The bill lapsed into law on July 30, 2022. #