



Save the Children

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Save the Children's statement on the short film, Virgin Marie

Recent data from the Philippine government's National Baseline Study on Violence against Children (2016) say that:

- 1 out of 5 children suffers from sexual abuse at home, in school and in the community;
- 17.1% of children aged 13-18 experience sexual violence in any setting;
- Only 30.5% of children who were aware of child protection services actually utilized such services; and
- 9 out of 10 children think that parents act in the best interest of children.

According to the same study, majority of children who experience violence do not report or seek support for a variety of reasons which includes not understanding that what they experienced is a problem, being shy or afraid to consult, not wanting more trouble, being worried that the person will not believe them, being afraid to be blamed, or they simply cannot trust or feel comfortable with them. These are the facts.

Save the Children Philippines believes that no child deserves to experience any form of abuse, or be exploited or neglected. We all need to recognize that as people and as adults, it is our duty to make sure that the children in our own families and communities are protected from all forms of violence against children. This is the right thing to do as people who respect and care about children.

The short film Virgin Marie makes a mockery of the collective efforts of the Philippine government, civil society organizations, and every child victim-survivor of violence and their families to break the silence surrounding the issue of child sexual abuse. For many years, various stakeholders have worked to make sure that there are laws, programs, and services that would help prevent and address the issue of child sexual abuse. There have been gains over the years but we still need to:

- increase the age of statutory rape from the very low 12 years old currently set in our laws;
- improve child victim-survivors' access to justice;
- ensure that programs and services are accessible to children especially those who are marginalized;
- help children understand what sexual abuse is, how they can protect themselves, and where they could seek support or report cases;
- address the reasons why children still do not report their experiences of abuse; and
- change society's acceptance of the rape culture.

There is so much that needs to be done and every one of us should be playing our part in addressing this issue. We can choose to use our talents and our voices to change the way society views child sexual abuse and to make sure that every Filipino child will be protected from this crime. Showing a film that raises doubts about children's experiences of sexual abuse, and about the intentions of people who are supposed to be helping them seek justice is not in the best interest of children, and does absolutely nothing to help protect children nor improve how our society treats them.

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Media Contacts:

Lean Pasion, OIC Head of Media and Communications
Lean.Pasion@savethechildren.org

Kim Rodriguez, Campaigns and Media Coordinator
Kim.Rodriguez@savethechildren.org