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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Save the Children Philippines calls for government endorsement of Safer Schools Declaration

Save the Children Philippines called for safer schools in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao as learners face attacks, recruitment of armed groups and sexual violence.

Across the world, attacks in schools have increased with 14,000 incidents in the last four years, including Philippines, according to figures reaching Save the Children.

Lawyer Albert Muyot, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Save the Children Philippines said schools should be zones of peace and learners should be protected from all forms of violence.

“We call on the Philippine government to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, a global commitment to protect students, teachers, schools from attacks and other effects of armed conflict,” said Muyot.

There are six violations against children in armed conflict, these include: Killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children as soldiers; sexual violence against children; abduction of children; attacks against schools or hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access for children.

Muyot said children in Mindanao experienced those grave violations including 60 confirmed attacks on schools during the five-month Marawi siege in 2017, a substantial increase from the 12 attacks in 2016, across conflict affected areas in Mindanao?

Prior, at least 1,000 students and teachers have been harassed and intimidated by armed groups in conflict affected provinces in Mindanao in the last four years while 30 schools were used as bases and camps.

Save the Children Philippines conducts resilience training to school children in disaster risk areas through the “Batang Empowered and Resilient Teams” in the Visayas and Mindanao provinces.

The Department of Education (DepEd) in region 12 has sought the integration of armed conflict as part of the risks being faced by schoolchildren in Mindanao.

The training will be pilot-tested this month by Save the Children Philippines in North Cotabato covering 10 schools.

At least 87 countries have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and committed to take actions to end targeting of schools and universities, and the killing, maiming, abducting, recruiting, and raping of students and teachers.

“Schools are where children’s dreams and potential take shape and become real,” said Muyot. “When a child goes to school, they have to know and feel they will be safe. They need to be protected and enjoy childhood.”

Muyot also welcomed the signing of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act (CSAC) Law or Republic Act 11188 that seeks to protect children from all forms of abuse, violence, cruelty and discrimination during armed conflict.

The CSAC law imposes sanctions on parties who commit “grave violations of children’s rights including killings, intentional and casual maiming, taking them as hostages or human shields, as well as recruitment into both government forces and lawless groups.” The law also imposes penalties on those who commit rape, sexual



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violence on children and women and deny them access to humanitarian assistance such as medical aid, food and psychosocial services.

Save the Children Philippines provides emergency learning kits and teaching aids to children affected by conflict in Mindanao.

Save the Children Philippines is currently implementing the “Spaces for Peace” project in Maguindanao where psychosocial support is provided to children affected by armed conflict. Save the Children also ensures that they have access to a safe and quality education.

Also, the group sets up Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) and Child Friendly Space (CFS) to allow displaced children to play and improve their well-being. “We continue to work closely with children, their families and communities to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms to ensure children are protected from conflict-related violence,” Muyot ended.

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Sources:

¹Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2018 Report

²UN Secretary General Report on Grave Violation of Children’s rights during conflict, January to December 2017

³GCPEA, 2018 Report

NOTES TO EDITOR:

As part of our global campaign to Stop the War on Children, Save the Children Philippines is asking everyone to sign up our petition that calls for the full implementation of the CSAC Law in this link

<https://www.savethechildren.org.ph/stop-the-war-on-children-petition> Together, we can help protect Filipino children from the horrors of armed conflict.

Save the Children is a global movement with presence in 120 countries. We believe that every child deserves a healthy start. We do whatever it takes for children, transforming their lives and the future we share.

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