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## Save the Children condemns reported violence, abuse, forced marriages to over 1000 children by religious cult; calls for immediate protection of affected children

Save the Children Philippines unequivocally condemns violence against children and expresses grave concern on the reported cases of alleged child abuse, rape, and forced marriages committed against minors in the Municipality of Socorro, Surigao Del Norte.

*“Every child deserves the right to live in a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment –free from all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation. Protecting children’s well-being is non-negotiable and should always be an absolute priority of parents, schools, communities, authorities, and the government in all settings, at all times,”* said Atty. Alberto Muyot, CEO of Save the Children Philippines.

In light of the issue, Save the Children believes time is of the essence and fears that there could be more affected children who are unaccounted for and whose lives and futures are at risk.

*“We urgently call upon the government, specifically our law enforcement agencies, to conduct immediate and thorough investigations into these incidents, secure the protection of the affected children, and bring the perpetrators to justice,”* said Muyot.

Save the Children Philippines has long been at the forefront of advocating for legislation aimed at eradicating violence against children such as Republic Act 11648 raising the age of sexual consent which increased the age of statutory rape from 12 to 16, and R.A. 11596 that prohibits and criminalizes the practice of child marriage.

*“These milestones represent the tangible progress we have made in our unwavering commitment to safeguarding children’s rights. However, our work doesn’t end with the passage of these laws; it begins there. It is of utmost importance that these legislative measures are not merely words on paper but are instead, rigorously implemented and enforced. We firmly believe that every child has the right to be protected and this must be upheld without compromise,”* Muyot said.

Save the Children earnestly calls upon all relevant authorities to align their actions with these crucial legal provisions and urges local governments to strengthen their child protection systems.

Save the Children sounds the alarm for everyone to remain vigilant in ensuring that every last child grows up safe, free, and happy, and that **violence against children is no longer tolerated.**

*“Together, we can collectively create a safer and more secure environment for all children in our society, ensuring that the promise of these laws becomes a reality, and no child is left vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Together, we can forge a brighter future where every child can thrive, free from fear and harm,”* Muyot concludes.

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