



PRESS STATEMENT

Public Calling for Accountability in the Ministry of Education

The Child Rights Coalition Malaysia (CRCM) and Education Cluster of CSO Platform for Reform (ED-Platform) are disturbed by the recent reports in the media on the state and development of the education system in Malaysia pertaining to the following:

1. Basic human rights violation of students

- a. The incidents of menstrual spot checks in schools and the moral policing of Muslim female students are a violation of the dignity of the child, their right to protection under Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which refers to the child's right to privacy. Such actions create fear in students and may result in trauma that affects their safety and ability to learn in school. This can have dire effects in their future.
- b. We have also noted another incident with grave concern that victim-blaming mindset of school teachers and State authorities where "rape talk" is dismissed as a joke.

"Rape talk" falls within the ambit of "sexual communication with a child" as defined by section 11 of the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, which carries a maximum prison sentence of 3 years. "Word or gesture intended to insult the modesty of any person" is further an offence under section 509 of the Penal Code.

We regret that the "rape talk" has been trivialised by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and persons in governmental positions, including the police. No person should be allowed to make rape threats or rape jokes to anyone, let alone a child. Threats of this nature levelled at children are a violation and detrimental to the child.

These incidents reflect serious fundamental challenges in our education system in respecting the basic human rights to privacy and dignity of a school going child.

The school **MUST** be seen as a safe place to prepare students for a better future. Students must be able to confide in their prefects, teachers, heads of school on any abuses they might face from bullying, body shaming, sexual harassment, discrimination, caning and other violations affecting the dignity of the child.

School teachers are the custodians of our children when they are in school. The MoE is entrusted with ensuring that the best interests of children are safeguarded, and it plays a large role in the way they are moulded and shaped for the future.

2. Abolition of UPSR and PT3 school examinations

While there are mixed reactions on either to abolish or maintain UPSR and PT3, the sudden abolishment of UPSR and cancellation of PT3 examinations further reveals the lack of visionary planning and clear direction on the part of the MoE. The Ministry has not clearly indicated a holistic alternative assessment. The current alternative assessment in trial, namely the National Examinations and School-based Assessments or Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah (PBS) remains controversial requiring much tweaking before it is implemented.

3. Uncertainties on schools re-opening and closing

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, arbitrary decisions have been made by the MoE on the closing and reopening of schools, with little or no consultation with relevant stakeholders. The long period of almost half a year lock down from schools due to COVID-19 and the uncertainties have invariably caused anxiety and hardship to students and their families.

Early this year, schools were reopened although children under the age of 18 have yet to be vaccinated. Since schools re-opened, COVID-19 cases among school children have been growing exponentially. It is noted that schools have adhered to strict SOP, the spike of cases in schools may have transmitted outside the schools. Yet, the causes for this rise have not been thoroughly investigated nor clearly communicated with stakeholders and the schools were forced into closure again.

4. Distortion of history in school textbooks

Malaysian history must reflect the people's struggles in the making of Malaysia (be they the migrant community, minority, majority or indigenous peoples of Malaysia). We urge the MoE to conduct a professional review of the textbooks so that the younger generation learn from the true Malaysian history and the rich diversity of our nation. Our history textbooks should also reflect and include various significant world civilisations to instil a global perspective.

In light of the above incidents, CRCM and the Ed-Platform call for the following:

- Teachers must be sensitised and trained in child rights to raise their awareness and professionalism as responsible protectors of children thus enabling schools to be a safe space.
- Teachers who have violated the dignity of their students to be made accountable for their actions.

- The MoE must view the above incidents as critical signs of an urgent need to review and re-evaluate all aspects of our education system.
- The government must institute reforms, with substantive stakeholder consultation to put the education system in the hands of professional educators while it plays the role of providing and facilitating resources.
- The MOE must uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in all aspects and all schools to comply fully with the Safe School Policy and/or the Child Protection Policy.

#MakeSchoolASaferPlace. Change now, we must!

Issued by:

CSOs Platform for Reform – Education Cluster (ED-Platform)

The Child Rights Coalition Malaysia (CRCM)

(The endorsing NGOs/CSOs are listed in the attachment.)

Note:

The Education Cluster is part of the CSO Platform for Reform, a coalition of 80 CSOs based in Malaysia, focusing on institutional reforms.

Child Rights Coalition Malaysia (CRCM) is a coalition of child rights NGOs that strive to effectively uphold and safeguard the rights of children. We intend to advance the child rights agenda to ensure the betterment of the future of Malaysia's children. We strongly encourage members of our society, including parents, teachers, and children to learn about the issues of child abuse and our readily available reporting mechanisms.

For further enquiry, please contact:

P.S. the Children

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List of endorsement for the statement on: Public Calling for Accountability in the Ministry of Education” released on 7/5/2021, 3pm

No.	Organisation
1	All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
2	Asia Community Service (ACS)
3	Association of Toy Libraries Malaysia (ATLM)
4	Borneo Komrad (NK)
5	CBR Network Malaysia (CBRNM)
6	Childline Foundation (CF)
7	CRIB Foundation (CRIBF)
8	ENGAGE
9	Family Frontiers (FF)
10	Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin, Malaysia (GOPIO Malaysia)
11	HSS Consultant Paediatrician
12	International Networking for Children Development and Protection (In-CHILD)
13	Inisiatif Pengislahan Pendidikan Nasional (IPPN)
14	Justice for Sisters (J4S)
15	Lawyer Kamek for Change (LK4C)
16	Liga Rakyat Demokratik (LRD)
17	Little One Step Studio (LOSS)
18	LLG Cultural Development Centre (LLG)
19	Majlis Kebajikan Kanak-kanak Malaysia (MKKKM)
20	Malaysian CARE (MC)
21	Monsoon Malaysia (MM)
22	National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC)
23	New Horizons Society (NHS)
24	Our Journey (OJ)
25	P.S. the Children (PSC)
26	Partners for Community Organisations, Sabah (PACOS Trust)
27	PAGE Malaysia
28	Persatuan Patriot Kebangsaan (PATRIOT)
29	Persatuan Aliran Kesedaran Negara (ALIRAN)
30	Persatuan Kanak-Kanak Istimewa Kajang Selangor (PKIKS)
31	Persatuan Pengasuh Berdaftar Malaysia (PPBM)
32	Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)
33	Pertubuhan Kebajikan Vivekananda Rembau (PKVR)
34	Pertubuhan TELANG Malaysia
35	Pertubuhan Wanita Malaysia untuk Kawalan Tembakau dan Kesihatan (MyWATCH)
36	Sabah Reform Initiative (SARI)

- 37 Sarawak Women for Women Society
- 38 Sisters in Islam (SIS)
- 39 Society for Equality, Respect And Trust for All Sabah (SERATA)
- 40 SPICES Early Intervention Centre (SPICES)
- 41 Suara Inisiatif (SUARAM)
- 42 Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SDNM)
- 43 The KL & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, Women Section (KLSCAH,WS)
- 44 The Talisman Project (TALISMAN)
- 45 Treat Every Environment Special Sdn Bhd (TREAT)
- 46 Vanguard For change (V4C)
- 47 Wings Melaka (WM)
- 48 World Vision Malaysia (WVM)
- 49 Yayasan Chow Kit (CCK)

Individual:

- 1 Dato' Dr. Amar Singh, HSS Consultant Paediatrician
- 2 Datuk Dr. Chiam Heng Keng, Social Psychologist
- 3 Goh Siu Lin, Child Rights and Family Lawyer