

ACT FAST TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN, 4 NOV 2008

The Women's Centre for Change, Penang (WCC) is extremely disturbed and shocked to learn that the teacher who was recently charged for molesting his students since 2006, have had more than 10 complaints made against him and yet no action was taken until recently. It took two brave students to lodge police reports before any investigation commenced.

WCC would like to know why the education authorities failed to act any sooner but waited for a police report to be made before any concrete action was taken? Will the Ministry of Education take any action taken against the former headmaster for his failure to report the sexual abuse complaints or he will be excused? Are there serious loopholes in the reporting system that the teachers are unable to act against an irresponsible school headmaster? Does the Ministry of Education have effective proper procedures for reporting sexual abuse cases committed by teachers?

This is not the first time WCC has come across a sexual abuse case involving a teacher that the school authorities either knew or suspected something was amiss but were reluctant to have the allegations or suspicions investigated. Are the school authorities more concerned about protecting irresponsible teachers than protecting innocent children? Is preserving the image of the school more important than our children's safety and well being?

Worse still, WCC has also raised concerns of sexual abuse cases by teachers which have resulted in the teacher/perpetrator being promptly "transferred" out of the school to another school in another state. Our observation has been that the relevant authorities do not take any such complaints seriously unless the child and the parents made police reports. The investigation, which may take months, is then left in the hands of the police.

WCC urges the Ministry of Education and relevant authorities to step up its procedures in schools to ensure the immediate safety of our children. Any report of abuse by teachers must be investigated immediately, the teacher be suspended until the outcome of such investigation by the education authorities. The perpetrator must be stopped and punished, and not by merely transferring him to another school as has happened.

It is terrible when children are sexually abused but when adults who are in a position to stop the abuse allowed such abuse to continue, then it is criminal! By allowing the perpetrator, a teacher, to carry on we are endangering the lives of many children whom he has access daily. Sexually abused children suffer long term psychological and social problems throughout their lives.

WCC conducts personal safety programmes entitled "Be Smart, Be Safe" (Bijak Itu Selamat) for hundreds of children on a yearly basis. We teach children that when they are abused, they must

quickly tell adults whom they trust. Of what use is educating our children when the adults fail them?

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