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PRESS STATEMENT: GISBH SENTENCING IS A REMINDER OF HOW LITTLE HAS CHANGED FOR CHILD PROTECTION

The lenient sentencing of Global Ikhwan Services and Business Holdings (GISBH) leaders highlights the ongoing systemic failure to protect children in welfare homes. This issue has reached a critical stage and requires immediate, decisive reform.

Despite the gravity of the case and widespread public outrage, 22 GISBH members were released last Friday after receiving only a 15-month jail term, backdated to their arrests. The alleged charges against key members of GISB, such as Nasiruddin Mohd Ali, his wife Azura Md Yusof, and Mohammad Adib At-Tamimi, son of Al-Arqam founder Ashaari Muhammad, were charged at the Selayang Sessions Court, under Section 130V(1) of the Penal Code for being members of an organised criminal group.¹

Last year, over 500 children and teenagers under GISBH's care were rescued across 20 care homes. Members of GISB were alleged to have groomed and sexually abused children, exploited them through child labour, took advantage of disabled children, forced the children to perform sexual acts on other children, including through rape, and subject them to various other forms of physical and emotional abuse "to populate orphanages and raise donations that funded their (members of GISBH's) lavish lifestyles".²

How is it possible for those who sexually and physically exploit children to be able to walk free after the shocking crimes committed by members of GISBH? As leaders, how is it that they are not held complicit in the crimes? The AGC must also explain why it offered an alternative charge under Section 43 of the Societies Act 1966, for being part of an illegal organisation, when the initial charge was being members of an

¹ CEO of Malaysia firm accused of child abuse says there were cases of sodomy | Reuters

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/02/01/asia/malaysia-gisbh-police-investigation-hnk-intl-dst>

organised criminal group under Section 130V(1) of the Penal Code, which provides for imprisonment of between five and 20 years upon conviction.

Sexual violence is not a light crime, and the children affected by it will likely suffer from long-term psychological trauma, experience learning difficulties, face low self-esteem and depression, and face health consequences, including impaired brain development (from toxic stress associated with violence) and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS and early pregnancies.

Martabat PJ joins in the call from other NGOs for more transparency over the case, including why perpetrators in a major case like this, involving the sexual violence and abuse of hundreds of disadvantaged children, were given reduced sentences. Some immediate actions need to be taken:

- Effective monitoring by healthcare professionals on the abuse children. As many of them are children of the GISB members, a much more vigilant monitoring, screening and counselling system is required for the child and family to end the repeat of abuses.
- In view of recent cases of sexual violence at schools and the allegations against GISB, it is important that institutions, such as the judiciary, police and government agencies take the lead in defending the Rights of the Child. Mainstreaming child protection into all sectors including legal, health, livelihoods, shelter, education and community-based protection are crucial in minimising risks of harm and ensuring the well-being of children.
- Child welfare homes have been a major concern for many years, as the Government and lawmakers have failed to address the complex system of rules that come with licensing and overseeing child welfare homes, including the fact that conflicting agencies are responsible for registering and conducting checks on these homes.
- The Government, in particular the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, needs to address gaps in inter-agency coordination and regulation of unregistered welfare homes. When the GISBH arrests were initially made last year, Suhakam's Children's commissioner Farah Nini Dusuki

called for more monitoring and supervision of welfare homes³ - a statement quoted in both local and international media.

- Child protection needs to be recognised as an issue that requires a comprehensive solution. We cannot just focus on legal mechanisms alone, but to also invest in trained professionals, having more data, creating awareness, and adopting a zero-tolerance approach at all levels, including the community and others.

Therefore, we once again renew civil society's call for a Royal Commission of Inquiry over the GISBH scandal and suggest effective strategies to protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation. This will include the implementation of policies, laws, and strategies in line with internationally recognised standards for evaluation and reporting.

The longer we delay justice, the more children will continue to pay the price.

(end)

ISSUED BY:

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ABOUT MARTABAT PJ

Martabat PJ is a community-based organisation that empowers women, youth, and marginalised groups through rights-based approaches. We advance gender equality by promoting awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence (GBV), while building community leadership and improving health and nutrition among families in Malaysia.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62r2dk5ekgo>