



## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

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A Pastoral Statement

### **PROTECT AND SAVE THE LITTLE ONES FROM THE REAL CULPRITS; REJECT HB 8858 LOWERING THE MINIMUM AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY**

***“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”***  
(Psalm 127: 3, ESV)

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) deplores to the highest level the approval of House Bill 8858 to lower the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR).

Lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) is not the solution. This House Bill will only mostly endanger children in conflict with the law coming from poor families. As a Church, we are guided by the inspiration of the Scriptures that require us to guard the little ones from any harm or maltreatment: *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven”*(Matthew 18: 10, ESV).

Scientific research shows that “children and adolescents differ significantly from adults in decision-making, propensity to engage in risky behavior, impulse control, identity development, and overall maturity” (Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2016, as quoted in the petition “No to lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Philippines”, **submitted to Senate President Sotto by the** Child Rights Network and Philippine Action for Youth Offenders).

As such, children should not be bound to the same standards as adults.

**The petition submitted to Senate President Sotto** declares:

*“We must not ignore scientific evidence that shows that criminalizing children does not solve the problem of children committing crimes; it only encourages re-offending. The change we want to see most is the stronger implementation of the Juvenile Justice Law.”*

**What the government needs to do is to fully and effectively implement the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, which** already provides guidelines on how children in conflict with the law should be held accountable. They are placed in a youth care facility to undergo intensive intervention programs supervised by a multi-disciplinary team.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development released this statement pertaining to this issue:

*“A lower age of criminal responsibility results in more children being detained, substantially higher cost of public expenditure, and an even higher social cost of re-offending and graver offending, which simply demonstrates that such measure is not cost-effective.”*

Pushing for an absurd law such as this only goes to show the government’s shameful failure to provide a healthy and favorable environment for the Filipino children, especially the poor ones. HB 8858 is unashamedly anti-poor, anti-child, and unchristian. We cannot allow this law to be passed unrestrained. The Bible so clearly directs us to *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”* (Ephesians 5: 11, ESV). Keeping our mouths bolted is essentially taking part in this **unfruitful work of darkness**.

We therefore appeal to the Philippine Congress and our duty-bearers in government to:

- Penalize instead the crime syndicates that exploit children, not the children who need to be saved, supported, and reformed.
- Fully and effectively enforce the law towards protecting, supporting and assisting both children who commit crimes and their victims.
- Instead of pushing for the lowering of the MACR, support the initiatives and programs of local government units in providing prevention, intervention, and diversion programs for children.

We also implore our constituents to join hands with us in exposing the infirmities of this ridiculous piece of legislation that would only bring harm to the poor children of the land.

We further call on our local churches to take seriously to heart our Christian Education ministry to discourage children from committing crimes of any sort; and engage in community ministries undertakings that cater to children with great emphasis on children’s rights and protection.


We also entreat our church-related educational institutions to consider providing scholarship support and assistance to poor and underprivileged children.

**WE STRONGLY REJECT HB 8858 IN THE INTEREST AND PROTECTION OF THE LITTLE ONES!**


On behalf of the UCCP National Council,  
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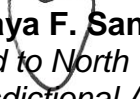
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