



## PRESS RELEASE | MEDIAVERKLARING

### NOTICE OF UNSUBSTANTIATED ACCUSATIONS AND UNDUE PUBLICITY

**Pretoria, 19 August 2023.** Over the past two weeks, CMR North (“CMRN”) was approached by a journalist of a leading publication for comment on an ongoing investigation of alleged sexual abuse of children at the hands of the foster parents they were placed with, by the Children’s Court. The issue was brought to the attention of the media by an activist NPO and its associates who present themselves as advocates for children’s rights.

Ever since its founding, the NPO has become known as a “go-to” for parents whose children have been temporarily removed by the Court and placed in places of safety, due to reports of abuse. This particular media query is based on two cases in which one of our sister organisations CMR Brits is involved. In the information that the activist NPO shared with the media, they do not distinguish between all the various parties (including the Children’s Court and the Department of Social Development) that are involved in child abuse cases. They also regard CMR Brits and CMRN as one and the same.

In their statements, they refer to two foster care cases in which they accuse “CRMN”, (meaning CMR Brits) of misconduct. They allege that the children involved in these two cases were unjustly removed from their parents, then placed in homes where they suffered sexual abuse at the hands of their foster parents, and that CMR Brits turned a blind eye to the abuse when it was reported to them. Dr Ronel Aylward, General Manager of CMRN states that even though CMR Brits operates independently, CMRN does render certain support services to CMR Brits. “As we regard all such allegations as serious, we conducted a full internal investigation into these accusations and we can subsequently confirm that CMR Brits is in no way guilty of the alleged misconduct”.

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#### CENTRES OF HOPE:

##### GAUTENG:

**Child Protection Centre**  
012 654 6026  
**Lynnwood**  
012 348 4500/348 0003  
**Daspoort/Pretoria-West**  
012 379 5860  
**VOS Community Centre**  
012 341 2318

**Child Centre**  
012 333 0421  
**Derdepoort**  
012 800 4866  
**Valhalla**  
012 660 2366  
**Wonderboom**  
012 567 4551

**Lotus Gardens**  
065 815 2240  
**Moot**  
065 818 5489  
**Pretoria-North**  
065 817 6162  
**Soshanguve**  
065 883 1907

##### NORTH WEST:

**Brits**  
012 252 3207  
**Hartbeespoort**  
064 956 6770

##### LIMPOPO:

**Louis Trichardt**  
015 516 5115  
**Messina (Musina)**  
015 534 0245  
**Warmbad (Bela Bela)**  
014 736 2557



She explains that in reality, all the appropriate child protection processes were followed when these children were initially removed from their parents' homes, and that the processes were appropriately documented. Similarly, the foster parents were appropriately evaluated before the children were placed with them. When reports of abuse by the foster parents were indeed brought to CMR Brits' attention, the children were removed and placed in places of safety by an order of the Children's Court, where they remain until these investigations are finalised. Aylward says the biggest concern is that this will lead to yet another misrepresentation of how child protection works, which will be a grave injustice to the very children who need the protection, with devastating statistics to prove just how much it is needed.

“Case in point - just in the past year, CMR Brits were involved in 188 foster cases, of which just one failed, due to unforeseen circumstances.” Taking this into cognisance, the percentage of foster cases where major issues arise is proportionately incremental. Says Aylward: “We must also not forget a very important point that was driven home by the documentary “Swartskaaap” that was recently broadcast on VIA, DStv channel 147. Which is, that the parents of children who have to be protected will almost always deny the abuse and rather accuse other parties of being in the wrong”.

Based on the unfair attack on CMRN since the public discussion of Abrie Raath's case last year, the organisation also considered it diligent to rather let their legal representative respond to this latest media query. The legal representative explained that due to the fact that the alleged sexual abuse is still being investigated, CMRN is prohibited from publicly commenting on it. The media was also cautioned that there are pending legal actions against the NPO in question, due to ongoing unsubstantiated accusations and defamatory statements.

Reverend Danie Janse van Rensburg, Chairperson of the CMRN Board, is most concerned about the ethical implications of this kind of undue media exposure of children who are victims of abuse. He argues that it verges on criminal because it poses the risk of the children involved being identified, violating their human right to dignity and privacy. This issue has been going on for more than two decades as it was already officially raised in a seminar hosted by child-rights bodies in 2002, which included the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) and the United Nations Children's Fund. The seminar was hosted in response to a general disregard by the media for their own ethical codes and the sections of legislation that govern the rights of children to privacy and dignity. This includes section 154(3) of the Criminal Procedure Act which for example states it is illegal to identify children who are either witnesses or perpetrators in a criminal act if they are under the age of 18.

At the seminar, well-known constitutional law expert Gilbert Marcus explained the main problem is that “the voluntary codes of conduct governing the media “don't seem to be working”. Currently, members of the public who find their rights have been violated by media reporting have recourse in the form of the Advertising Standards Authority for advertising-related

complaints, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission for television and radio reporting, and the Press Ombudsman for reports in the print media. However, the guidelines for reporting on a variety of issues, including child abuse and sexual assault, are still voluntary. In his closing statement at the seminar, Marcus stated that whilst no one is in favour of state regulation of the media, it should not detract from the need for a system that ensures the vulnerable sectors of society are properly protected.

Janse van Rensburg fully supports this notion, stating that whilst it is critical for the public to continue disclosing any suspected misconduct that involves a child, care must be given to the public discussion of it. Especially if the facts that surround the case have not yet been confirmed, and especially if it involves a minor child whose identity could be exposed in the process. The journalist involved has refused to share the full article with CMRN's legal representatives for fact-checking before it is published, and whether it will be published as promised remains to be seen. "Should it be published though, we would like to caution our target audiences to check the facts for themselves before arriving at any conclusions and to support us in protecting the identities of the children involved", concludes Janse van Rensburg.

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**contact: Dr Ronel Aylward – General Manager of CMR North  
manager2@cmrn.co.za**