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How a Religious Institution Dealt with Child Abuse

A case study of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

My name is Kamala Priya Dasi, and I grew up in southwest Germany with my loving parents, two sisters and one brother.[1] I joined ISKCON, also known as the Hare Krishna movement, in Heidelberg in 1988, and in 1999 I moved to Sweden. In 2007 I earned a master's degree in education at the University of Gothenburg, and taught for several years in Swedish public secondary schools. Throughout these years I have been an active member of ISKCON. At present I work with youth projects within the movement.

ISKCON is part of the *bhakti* (devotional) Vaishnava tradition of Hinduism, which has roots going back to the Vedas and Upanishads, and especially to the teachings of Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Bhagavata Purana*. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica 70% of today's Hindus are culturally influenced by the Vaishnava tradition (Britannica 1996, 646).

In 1965, the spiritual teacher A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada sailed from India to the United States on the suggestion of his predecessor to teach bhakti yoga and Vaishnavism to Westerners. Young persons, many of them hippies influenced by the counterculture, showed interest in Bhaktivedanta's teachings and joined him in his missionary work. Swami Bhaktivedanta founded ISKCON in 1966, and within a few years, the movement spread to cities around the world and established temples with monastic facilities (*ashrams*), farm communities, and restaurants.

The new converts lived together in these ashrams and were given a spiritual education in Vaishnavism as well as an opportunity to serve Lord Krishna by spreading His message. As the number of marriages among Bhaktivedanta's

[1] This article is a revised version of a paper that was presented by the author, at the conference of the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), on June 26, 2015 in Stockholm. The article was completed in August 2015.

followers increased and children were born, a young ISKCON movement began to face the challenge of accommodating the needs of new families. In order to facilitate child care and education and at the same time maintain the focus on proselytizing, boarding schools were created, in which the children could get both a spiritual and general education.

The first school was opened in 1971 in Dallas, Texas, and within ten years, ISKCON had more than a dozen schools around North America, and several more on other continents. By the end of the 1980s, however, most of those boarding schools had been closed, replaced by day schools. Today, most of ISKCON's children attend government schools (Wolf 2004, 322).

Bhaktivedanta had wanted boarding schools, traditionally known in India as *gurukula*, "school of the spiritual teacher", in order to educate the children in the values of Vaishnava tradition and in general subjects. He saw these schools as places where the children would be treated with care and affection. In a letter to a couple helping to pioneer the *gurukula* system in ISKCON he wrote, "Krishna [God] is sending us so many children, and they must be nicely guided and educated so that they can grow up to become first-class Vaishnavas [devotees of God]" (Bhaktivedanta, letter to Bhurijana, Jagattarini, Los Angeles, 7 June, 1976).

The main reason for closing the boarding schools was that a number of the children fell victim to abuse. The perpetrators were mainly teachers and monitors in the schools, and the victims were mainly boys. The incidents in the schools were neglect as well as physical, emotional and in some cases even sexual abuse. It is not clear how many children and youth were abused (Rochford 1998, 47), but 535 victims reported in a court case filed against ISKCON in 2000 that they had suffered maltreatment (see below). Child abuse in ISKCON occurred mainly in the 1970s and '80s, and mainly in boarding schools in North America and India (particularly Dallas, Seattle, West Virginia, Mayapur in West Bengal, and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh). Fortunately, boarding schools in other parts of America such as California and Mississippi, and most of those in Europe and Australia, faced fewer cases of or no abuse at all (Rochford 1998, 59). One longtime teacher stated, "[child abuse] wasn't all-pervasive. It wasn't in all *gurukulas*. It didn't affect all children. But it was in enough schools and affected enough children and it went on for enough time ..." (Rochford 1998, 47).

Several reports and articles have been written on different aspects of child abuse in ISKCON, and in this paper I wish to explore the following two questions:

1. How could child abuse take place in ISKCON?
2. What did ISKCON do to stop child abuse and prevent it in the future?

To gain both clarity and balance about these topics from a number of perspectives I studied articles from a variety of sources – ISKCON insiders, who helped develop the movement; former students who had been abused and some who had not; anti-cult activists; and researchers in the fields of Sociology of Religion, History of Religions, and New Religious Movements. I also interviewed key persons in ISKCON such as Anuttama Das, a member of the Governing Body Commission (GBC). Other important informants were the leader of the Child Protection Team (CPT), a former student, and an educated and caring former teacher, all from the community in Almviks Gård, Järna, in Sweden.

Most of the articles that I read and are currently available focus on the abuse that happened within ISKCON in the 1970s and '80s. Here I would like to focus on what ISKCON has done to stop child abuse and what the movement is doing today to prevent abuse and create an environment in which children are lovingly raised and cared for.

How could child abuse happen in the Hare Krishna movement?

There are no excuses for child abuse and for what happened to the children in our movement, but I would still like to have a look at some of the conditions that have led to child abuse in ISKCON. It is also important to review the broader social context that had an impact in the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Child abuse is a severe problem in society at large. Her Majesty Silvia, the Queen of Sweden and founder of the Childhood Foundation, expressed the following in a talk in New York Central Park in 2014 before more than 60,000 mostly young people: "It [child abuse] is happening everywhere, in every country, in every town, and on all levels of society." In Sweden, for example, at the end of 2005 it was discovered that since the 1920s several thousand children in foster care institutions or foster families – children who were relocated through government intervention – were neglected or psychologically, physically, or sexually abused by their caregivers (SOU 2009; *Svenska*

Dagbladet, 2013), and recent reports show that despite different measures it is still going on (Kalla Fakta, 2014). Furthermore, throughout Swedish society, the latest statistics show that in 2014, 19,100 cases of abuse against children were reported (BRIS)[2], and experts suspect that many more cases go unreported. The World Health Organization reports that 25% of all adults worldwide have been physically abused as children, and one girl out of five as well as one boy out of thirteen have been sexually abused (WHO, 2014).

As Queen Silvia declared, child abuse happens everywhere and on all levels of society. It happens in private homes as well as in big organizations such as schools and sport clubs, and unfortunately also in religious institutions such as churches or temples. It happens on all socio-economic levels – rich, poor and middle class. It can happen in any place where there are children.

Members of religious institutions tend to trust other members and their leaders, whom they expect will behave according to the high ethical principles their faith teaches. However, in 2004 a research study conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York revealed that between 1950 and 2002 the total number of Catholic priests in the US suspected of abuse was 4,392, which are 3% to 6% of all priests during that period. A total of 10,667 individuals made allegations of child sexual abuse against those priests. (John Jay College of Criminal Justice 2004, 4)

It is also important to note the general global lack of awareness about the devastating effects of child abuse in those years. In some countries corporal punishment was legally and socially accepted as a method of discipline, so that children could be beaten and no one thought of it as abuse. First in the late 1970s and early ’80s newspapers and journals began to publish articles about child abuse, and media and policy makers started to pay attention to it as late as in 1984–85 (Wolf 2004, 331). Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force as late as in 1990. Queen Silvia emphasized

[2] ”År 2014 anmäldes sammantaget 19 100 misshandelsbrott mot barn. Det motsvarar 23 procent av alla anmälda misshandelsbrott. Av dessa riktades 7 460 (39 %) mot flickor och 11 600 (61 %) mot pojkar. Totalt sett ökade antalet anmälda misshandelsbrott mot barn (0–17 år) med 8 procent mellan 2013 och 2014. Antalet anmälda misshandelsbrott mot barn i åldern 0–6 år ökade med 16 procent (+536 brott) till 3 800 anmälda brott under 2014. Även antalet anmälda brott mot barn i åldern 7-14 år ökade med 12 procent (+ 1 090 brott) till 9 870 brott medan misshandelsbrott mot barn i åldern 15–17 år minskade till 5 430 brott (-3 %). Misshandelsbrotten mot barn i åldern 7–14 år anmäls i hög grad av skolan, vilket slår igenom i statistiken på genom att färre brott anmäls under sommaren än under terminerna.”

in her 2014 speech that “fifteen years ago there were not many who were willing to discuss these issues.”

Let us now turn back to the early years of ISKCON and its young, largely hippie members. Bhaktivedanta gave his followers a spiritual alternative to the lifestyle they were leading and, through the spiritual regimen he prescribed, helped many of them give up drugs and other intoxicants. In the early ’70s the movement grew rapidly. The “Hare Krishna explosion,” as some dubbed this sudden and unexpected growth, surprised even its members. Within a few short years, thousands were recruited and many temples opened, and Bhaktivedanta delegated the leadership of the movement more and more to his young followers.

The rapid expansion of the movement was, however, conducive to child abuse. In those early days, anyone could live in ISKCON’s communities without background check, and quickly rise to a position of leadership. The sweep of Hare Krishna recruitment included unknowingly even people with criminal records or a history of pedophilia. With no screening or application process in place, and no awareness of child abuse, some pedophiles found golden opportunities. Furthermore, most of the leaders were inexperienced, being still in their early twenties and new to both Vaishnava practice and culture, as well as the complexities of managing such a burgeoning institution. Many of these leaders were overzealous and fanatical, with an immature understanding of how to apply Vaishnava teachings to behavior and ethics. ISKCON’s teachings are centered on bhakti, devotion, and loving relationships as well as a simple lifestyle, but then austerity and celibacy was regarded as the best way to spiritual success. That’s why not much importance was given to families and children, who often were ignored, neglected, or even “preached against” (Wolf 2004, 328–29).

Yet there were many teachers who wanted the best for the children. However, they were very young and inexperienced, and some had little or no credentials. Some found themselves overburdened and they found it hard to cope with the challenging and demanding situations of the boarding schools. These conditions, along with the fact that parents lived separate from their children or had little contact with them, made ISKCON’s schools vulnerable to child abuse (Wolf 2004, 328).

Fortunately, a number of schools in ISKCON were spared from child abuse. Some reasons for this were that the teachers were qualified or they had their own children in the school which helped them to establish trusting and protective relationships with the children. Additionally, parents were more involved (Wolf 2004, 330), the schools had better facilities and they were not as overcrowded. Some former children also told about their loving exchanges with Bhaktivedanta Swami. As a result, several children presented positive reports about growing up in ISKCON's boarding schools. Positive reports were even given by some children who faced abuse (Wolf 2004, 328; Rochford 1998, 59; Deadwyler 2004, 355; Frisk 2007, 213–16).

What ISKCON leaders and members have done to stop child abuse in ISKCON

In the 1970s corporal punishment in schools was allowed and practiced in India as well as in several states in the US (Lyman, 2006). It was forbidden in India only later on.[3] Nonetheless, when Bhaktivedanta heard that children were sometimes beaten in ISKCON schools he firmly condemned it. For example, in several letters that he wrote to teachers and parents he stated the following:

> If there is need you may shake your finger at them but never physical punishment is allowed. Try as far as possible to discipline them with love and affection. (Bhaktivedanta, letter to Aniruddha Das, Bombay, 10 January, 1972)

> So I have heard that there has been some beating with sticks on the children. Of course I do not know, but that should not be. (Bhaktivedanta, letter to Rupa Vilasa Das, Hyderabad, 18 November, 1972)

> Now the thing is, children should not be beaten at all, that I have told. They should simply be shown the stick strongly. So if one cannot manage in that way then he is not fit as teacher. If a child is trained properly in Krishna Consciousness, he will never go away. That means he must have two things, love and education. So if there is beating of child, that will be difficult for him to accept in loving spirit, and when he is old enough he may want to go away – that is the danger. So why these things are going on – marching and chanting japa[4], insufficient milk, too strict enforcement of time schedules, hitting the small children? Why these things are being imposed? Why they are inventing these such new things like marching and japa like military? What can I do from

[3] A prohibition to use physical force in dealing with children in public schools was explicitly stated in the National Policy on Education of the Government of India in 1992 (Government of India, 1992, 14).
[4] Recitation of sacred sounds (mantras), characteristic of the practice of Hinduism.

> such a distant place? They should run and play when they are small children, not forced to chant japa, that is not the way. So I have given you the guiding principles, it is not that I must be consulted with every small detail, that is the business of the in-charge, but if no one is there who can manage in the right way, what can I do? Now if you have got the right idea how to do it, you may go there again and take some responsible post for correcting the situation, that will be your real duty. (Bhaktivedanta, letter to Bhanutanya Das, teacher at the *gurukula* in Dallas, Hyderabad, 18 November, 1972.)

Swami Bhaktivedanta passed away in November 1977, but despite his instructions on educating children with love and affection, child abuse occurred, unknown to most of the movement's members and leaders. Eventually, in the late '80s both a member of the Governing Body Commission (GBC) and the Minister for Education became aware of the problem. They brought the issue to the attention of the whole body of the GBC, ISKCON's highest ecclesiastical and managerial authority, and urged them to take action. Some leaders wanted to avoid the issue (Wolf 2004, 330), but others understood the severity of the problem, although, it seems, not its breadth, so that in the spring of 1990 the GBC passed Resolution 119 (Anuttama, interview, 2015). That resolution included ISKCON's first official policy for dealing with child abuse and created a system for "investigating, reporting, and preventing incidents of child abuse" (Wolf 2004, 331).

I still remember when in the early 1990s the leader of the Heidelberg temple, where I was serving at the time, read aloud a letter from our GBC representative, reporting the occurrence of child abuse in ISKCON. The letter requested all members to be alert against the potential risks of child abuse and immediately report any such instance. This was the first time I had heard about child abuse in the movement.

Meanwhile, former students of the boarding schools grew into adulthood and began to disclose the abuses they had suffered as children in newsletters, alumni reunions, and in meetings with the GBC and senior members (Wolf 2004, 331). In May 1996, ISKCON leaders in North America invited a group of about a dozen young members in their twenties and thirties to present their experiences in the movement's boarding schools. Anuttama Das, who was present, tells that all but one of these students offered testimony of having personally experienced or witnessed physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Many of the leaders were brought to tears, and some fell to the floor in front of the speakers to beg forgiveness for their ignorance. That meeting and the testimonies presented

forced the society to come to grips with what was now publicly understood as a severe problem that had harmed the lives of many Krishna children for more than a decade. On that very day the organization *Children of Krishna* was formed consisting of ISKCON youth and senior members (Anuttama, interview, 2015).

Children of Krishna soon received funds from the ISKCON leadership and other concerned members and it started to issue grants to assist the youth with education and mental therapy, as well as with the organization of youth projects (Wolf 2004, 331–332).

In the spring of 1996, a meeting for discussing social development was organized in Germany, to which members of the GBC and leaders in the field of education were invited. There it was stated that the movement had neglected two important ingredients for building up a strong religious community: facilitating and supporting families, and developing a proper system of education. Affectionate care and love for children by parents, leaders, and the movement was then seen as a priority (Harikesa Swami 1998, 245–246).

In 1997 the GBC formed the ISKCON Child Protection Task Force "to develop a comprehensive plan for ISKCON to address past, present, and future cases of child abuse, as well as a system for child protection education" (Wolf 2004, 332). Based on the results of that Task Force the GBC called for the establishment of an ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (CPO), which was opened in April 1998 (Wolf 2004, 332).

In June 1998, ISKCON published in its own *ISKCON Communications Journal* an article written by independent sociologist of religion Burke Rochford, documenting the history of child abuse in the movement (Rochford 1998). In this way ISKCON acknowledged its failure to protect the children of the movement, and also created more awareness about the problem of child abuse.

In the year 2000, ninety-two former students filed a legal suit against ISKCON in the United States for the psychological, physical and sexual abuse they had suffered. In a negotiated settlement the court ordered that ISKCON contact all children who had grown up in the movement and ask those who had suffered any kind of abuse to report and claim compensation. Through this process more than 400 former victims eventually came forward and ISKCON settled in bankruptcy court 9.5 million dollars in graduated settlements to a total of 535 victims (Frisk 2007, 93).

At present, ISKCON has only two international boarding schools, both of them located in India. These schools have qualified teachers, who are aware of the danger of child abuse and are educated in its prevention. It is also a requirement that the parents of the children live in the community. In general it is though estimated that 95% of the members of ISKCON today live outside the compounds of temple ashrams and their children attend state-supported schools.

The CPO (Child Protection Office):

As mentioned above, the international Child Protection Office (CPO) (see: Dhira Govinda 1998, 61–64; and CPO) was established in early 1998. The current Director is Champakalata Dasi, who holds a B.A. and a Bachelor of Law, and who has passed the Attorneys' admission exams in South Africa. She furthermore holds a post-graduate degree in education and has her own law firm since 1995, where she practices criminal law, real estate law, and labor law.

The CPO has two primary functions:

1. Responding to and resolving cases of abuse
   ISKCON law requires that allegations of child abuse must be reported to secular and government authorities. In addition, the CPO trains internal "review panelists," who determine the relationship alleged abusers may have with ISKCON, if any, and decides on restrictions and requirements according to the severity of the abuse. To date, the CPO has offered fourteen training courses worldwide, resulting in 104 internal review panelists. Panelists receive training in how to recognize child abuse, types of abuse, abuser typology, investigative procedures including how to deal with disclosures of abuse, and the CPO's particular standards in relation to ISKCON.
2. Systems for prevention
   The CPO assists ISKCON's schools, temples, and communities in child protection, and it helps establish, develop, and educate local Child Protection Teams (CPTs). The CPO also recommends policies regarding child protection to the GBC.

Some practical tasks carried out by the Child Protection Office:

- To send information packages about child protection to ISKCON schools and temples throughout the world.

- To maintain a website designed for both children and adults offering both education in child protection and information about abuse (www.childprotectionoffice.org).
- To explain and support how to screen ISKCON volunteers and employees, particularly those who will have contact with children.
- To hold child protection training and information seminars. Such seminars have been held in the UK, Italy, Hungary, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, North America, South America, Dubai, Australia, India, and South Africa. As a result, more than 500 ISKCON devotees have been trained in the protection of children. These seminars are aimed to build and stabilize local CPTs.

The child protection training and information seminars include the following:

- Various types of abuse
- Indicators of abuse
- How offenders operate within and outside religious organizations
- What to do when abuse occurs
- How to prevent child abuse
- How to educate children in child abuse
- Case studies

CPT (Child Protection Teams):

As a second level of protection the GBC has mandated that every community should have a CPT in place. There are, however, several small centers that do not yet consistently maintain a team, mainly because they do not have any children – or have only a few children – in their communities.

CPTs should consist of a minimum of 3–4 persons, depending on the size of the community. The members of the CPT should be mature, stable adults, and the team should preferably include a teacher, a parent, and a temple authority.

The tasks of the CPT are:

- To raise awareness of and provide information on child protection issues in their community.
- To educate parents and children in child protection.
- To hear concerns about child abuse and maintain confidentiality.

- To be the first responders when abuse is alleged.
- To implement measures that help prevent child abuse.

The team also serves as a liaison between the ISKCON community, the CPO, and local law enforcement and social service authorities. As already mentioned, it is both state-mandated and an ISKCON law that alleged abuse be reported to government authorities. In 1998, when the CPO processes were first put in place, a child abuse case surfaced at a temple in North America and the local CPT informed and then assisted state authorities in their investigation. The team members were later commended for their important help (Wolf 2004, 332-333).

To date, the CPO has investigated about 350 reports of alleged child abuse, most of it abuse committed during the 1970s and '80s (CPO). ISKCON members, including abused victims, as well as legal professionals and leaders from other religions have expressed appreciation for the efforts of the CPO. They have also commended the willingness of ISKCON members to be straightforward about what happened in the movement, their cooperation with government authorities, and their efforts to make sure it never happens again. Research has shown that "the trauma for a child abuse victim is lessened if he or she sees that there are consequences for the offender, and if those consequences are publicized. In this and other ways the APVC[5] [initial name of the CPO] has provided some relief for victims of child abuse in ISKCON" (Wolf 2004, 335).

How to reduce the risk for child abuse

In her speech, Queen Silvia asked the youth to speak out against abuse, and said: "There is so much more to do. Speak out against abuse! When you see violence in your community, make sure that it stops!" (Queen Silvia of Sweden, 2014)

There are several action plans promoted by the CPO that can reduce the risk of child abuse. For example,

- Children should receive education in child protection. According to Wolf: "Despite all preventive measures, there is a significant possibility that a child will be approached by a person with abusive intentions. A child who has received child protection education has a better chance of avoiding abuse"

[5] Acronym for the "Association for the Protection of Vaishnava Children".

(Wolf 2004, 328). Such education includes "good touch, bad touch," "STOP-GO-TELL."
- All personnel in ISKCON schools should be screened. This is a common procedure in government schools these days.
- The school staff should receive training in child protection.
- Isolated contact between unrelated adults and children should be avoided.
- There should be increased parental participation in children related activities, and parents should supervise their children in the temple compounds.
- Building facilities should be made open in such a way as to discourage abusers.

Sweden – a case study

As mentioned before, child abuse in ISKCON mainly happened in the US and India. In Europe and Australia it was rather rare.

In Sweden, ISKCON started a primary school at Korsnäs Gård, south of Stockholm, in 1979. A few years later the school was moved to Almviks Gård about 60 km from Stockholm. The school was closed in 2003 due to low attendance as well as not having a laboratory for teaching natural sciences. The school first operated as a boarding school (1979-1984) and thereafter was turned into a day-school (Sardella 2007, 137 ff). On average, seven to twenty children attended the Almvik School per year. These children were mainly from the Nordic countries and Germany, and most of the parents either lived at Almvik or close by (Krishna Das, interview, 2015).

Some of the former students that I contacted through the years had pleasant and positive experiences in their schooling, and made friendships which still last today. Mohini, 29, a former student who grew up at Almvik tells that she loves Almvik, that she had wonderful experiences there and that she also wants her children to grow up at Almvik (Mohini Dasi, interview, 2015). Some other students, however, felt neglected and had some bad experiences. The facilities in those days were very poor, with no proper housing and clothing. In 2008 the book *Sektbarn* (*Sect Children*) was published, and thus it became known to the leaders and members that some of the former students had experienced physical and psychological abuse by few individual teachers (Essén 2008, 141 ff). After becoming aware of that, the Swedish National Council wrote letters to the children who had attended the school at Almvik, asking them for forgiveness in

case they had suffered any kind of abuse (see "Letter of Apology", Appendix 1). There was also one reported case of sexual abuse by one teacher. Once the abuse was discovered it was reported to the police. The victim published his experiences in a short book called *My Karma, My Fault* in 2010. ISKCON's Swedish National Council met with the victim after the publication, and formally apologized for what had happened to him. The Council also raised a grant for him to use as he saw fit and bought sixty copies of his book to distribute to the GBC and other members of ISKCON worldwide. This was done to both help the victim as well as to highlight the serious effects of child abuse (Krishna Das, interview, 2015).

Previously, in connection with the collective court case filed in America against ISKCON in the beginning of 2000, former Almvik students were asked by ISKCON in North America to report any abuse they had suffered to the American authorities and apply for compensation.

At the beginning of 2000, CPTs were established in ISKCON temples in Sweden. These teams follow CPO and government guidelines and have actively worked to prevent the abuse and neglect of children. In 2008, a member of the CPO from the US visited Stockholm and guided temple members and CPTs in their work. In 2011, CPO Director Champakalata Dasi came to Stockholm to hold a seminar on child protection (Radha Dasi, interview, 2015).

At present in Almviks Gård there are about 15 families with 27 children from newly born to the age of 19. Most of the parents have regular jobs outside the community, and children go to school in nearby Järna. Thereby the children today can easily integrate into Swedish society. The families at Almviks Gård have throughout the years developed loving and caring relationships, and there is a shared sense of awareness, responsibility and protection for the children.

The Almvik CPT has four members and is headed by a mother of three who holds a bachelor in education. She has several years of experience working in government schools. At Almvik she organizes a Sunday school, where she teaches the values of Vaishnava tradition along with dance, theater, and music with the help of other parents. The CPT raises awareness for child protection by e.g. organizing seminars, or requesting parents and visitors at festivals and other larger gatherings to watch for their children's safety.

Recently, members of the Swedish National Council have started a Youth Forum, in which the youth regularly meet, deepen their friendships and perform and organize different activities and workshops together.

The situation and mood in ISKCON today has changed. According to Liselotte Frisk, a Swedish scholar of New Religious Movements, ISKCON has tried in many ways to solve the problems from the past and to avoid them today. She confirms that the members today are more integrated into Swedish society, have their jobs or study at universities while at the same time choosing to practice their faith (Frisk 2007, 103-105). Furthermore, ISKCON members engage in interfaith dialogues, as well as cooperate with the local government regarding social and cultural activities.

Conclusion

As a member of ISKCON I feel very sorry for the pain our children in the past had to go through in their upbringing in our movement. Of course, the pain caused to these children and their families can never be excused. I deeply pray that the Almighty Lord, who is all-good, will eternally bless and protect them. And I will try my best to do whatever I can to prevent abuse and to protect our children today and in the future.

I also have hope, because I see that ISKCON, after a period of blindness, has tried to deal with the problem of child abuse in a self-critical and self-healing way, and that the movement has changed for the better. Today, I believe that ISKCON's members have matured. Most members have integrated into society and also have learned to live a more balanced live. The movement has learned from past mistakes, is aware of the danger of child abuse, and is determined to continue improving the situation for children now and into the future.

The CPO is doing important service in raising awareness, providing education and urging everyone to speak out against abuse. These efforts are visible in the communities of the Hare Krishna movement today and they have resulted in increasing the care and protection for the children, the most vulnerable members of our society.

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Appendix 1:

Letter of Apology to the Former Students of the School at Almvik Gård

June 2008

Dear ... ,

The recent interviews given by a *gurukula* alumna to a reporter and published in her book, *Sektbarn*, have finally opened the discussion among the devotees in Sweden about the past Swedish *gurukulas* and communities and what went on there. Although we hope your childhood was in many regards happy, it has become unavoidably clear that some of you also suffered different kinds of neglect and abuse, including verbal, emotional, physical, and in some cases, even sexual abuse, in the very place where we would have hoped you would find love, care, and protection.

As members of ISKCON Sweden we would like to apologize to you. We are deeply sorry that such abuse occurred. As an institution we need to look at and take responsibility for our past and to acknowledge—and if possible rectify—whatever damage the institution caused. You were our most vulnerable members, and we are ashamed to think of what certain of you suffered. We have lost a great treasure by allowing some of you to be treated badly in your childhood. You deserve an open recognition of what happened to you and our sincere and full apology.

Because of the courage of *gurukulis* around the world who have spoken out despite their pain, many devotees in ISKCON have finally become aware how seriously vigilant we need to be against abuse in our schools, temples, and projects. We are dedicated to ensuring that the terrible things that some of you have experienced will not happen again.

If you would like to meet with any of us in person, speak on the phone, or write to us, please contact us. We are here for you. Please know that you are always welcome to visit.

[Signed by the members of the Swedish National Council].

Appendix 2:

ISKCON Child Protection Policy and Operational Guidelines

Introductory Statement

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is committed to the well being of all individuals involved with ISKCON, especially children and other more vulnerable participants. ISKCON recognizes that children, for their full and harmonious development, need to be raised in an atmosphere of love, support, guidance and understanding. ISKCON acknowledges that children, when so raised, are likely to play a vital role in the future of our Society. Thus, placing the interests of the children first is not only in the best interest of the children themselves, but also of ISKCON, and society at large.

ISKCON affirms that children have the need and the right to be protected, nurtured and guided. This includes the right of all children and young people to live in an environment where they are protected from exploitation and abuse, and to actively participate in temple/devotional activities within the ISKCON community. Thus, for ISKCON, the protection of children is paramount. All persons who associate within ISKCON should be able to confidently trust those within ISKCON who associate with, care for, and minister to them. This is especially true of children. The violation of this trust through abuse or harassment of children by ISKCON leadership, clergy or other personnel is a source of great pain and disturbance for those directly affected as well as the greater Vaisnava community and society at large.

The GBC directly, through its influence within ISKCON and its participants, and particularly through the ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (CPO), is committed to make every reasonable effort to protect children and to prevent abuse of children. Hence, these ISKCON Child Protection Policy and Operational Guidelines (hereafter “Guidelines”) are meant to put in place policies that facilitate prompt and appropriate response to all allegations of abuse wherever there is a reasonable belief that abuse has occurred.

ISKCON is committed to implementing these Guidelines to ensure that everyone involved with children honors their responsibilities to safeguard children from harm. This can be achieved only by a clear commitment from all ISKCON participants, especially those in

management, leadership and educational roles, to follow these Guidelines, which includes where applicable to promptly report any concerns about children's welfare to the relevant secular authorities.

The aim of these Guidelines is to promote good practice and offer effective policies to provide children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in ISKCON communities. They are also intended to facilitate the CPO and its agents, local Child Protection Teams (CPT), and other ISKCON authorities, in making informed and confident decisions in regards to specific child protection issues and to offer clear guidance for addressing instances of child maltreatment.

Any credible report of child maltreatment to the CPO or a CPT will be taken seriously and receive a confidential, adequate, consistent and sensitive response. ISKCON will comply with all obligations of both civil and ecclesiastical law. It will endeavor to prevent abuse and harassment to the fullest extent possible, provide education and guidance as appropriate, and promote healing and empowerment when needed.

No person, whether in leadership or clergy, who has been determined to have engaged in acts of abuse, will be allowed to remain active in a position of trust or authority within ISKCON. Such actions violate civil and criminal laws, as well as Vaisnava spiritual principles, and are outside the scope of the duties, employment and engagement of all personnel. ISKCON will not tolerate any such criminal behavior. This policy applies to all ISKCON temples, centers, projects and activities within ISKCON.

Balanced care will be taken to protect the rights all parties involved, particularly any person who claims to have been abused as well as the person against whom an allegation has been made. Should an accusation be found accurate, every reasonably possible step will be taken to protect the abused person and prevent the accused from ever again gaining access to, or the trust of, any vulnerable person within ISKCON. Conversely, should an accusation be proven unfounded, every reasonable step will be taken to help restore the good name of the person falsely accused.

In sum, the intention of ISKCON in offering these Guidelines is to promote a balanced expression of acknowledgment, support, healing and empowerment based on the underlying and unwavering principle that acts of abuse or harassment by ISKCON clergy and personnel will not be tolerated.

In support of that principle, the disclosure of alleged abusive conduct will be promptly addressed; the accused will be confronted with a view to doing justice; the alleged victim will be supported throughout this process; the accused will receive a fair hearing; all parties shall be acknowledged, respected and shown civility at every stage; if the accusation is found to be unsubstantiated it will be publicly acknowledged as such, if appropriate; and, if the accusation is substantiated appropriate discipline will be instituted with a view to protecting the victim and the community, and preventing abusive behavior in the future.