



ISKCON Governing Body Commission Society

Under the Societies Registration Act, West Bengal

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Official Statement of the Governing Body Commission Regarding Abuse in Mayapur and the CPO Decision Against (the former) Bhakti Vidya Purna Swami, aka Anirdesya Vapu dasa

November 24, 2022

Dear ISKCON Devotees and Friends,

Please accept our humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

The ISKCON Governing Body Commission (GBC) expresses our heartfelt pain and deep concern upon learning of the abuse of some of our members and children as documented in the October 28, 2022 report of the ISKCON International Child Protection Office (CPO).

The report ascertains that Bhakti Vidya Purna Swami, aka Alan Ross Wexler, now to be known as Anirdesya Vapu dasa, repeatedly engaged in the sexual abuse of a minor girl, as well as other forms of sexual harassment, emotional and psychological abuse of minors, and also engaged in sexual acts with an adult woman. He has admitted to some of these grave offences while under investigation.

Such behaviors are immoral, against Vaishnava principles, and in gross violation of the vows and duties of any Vaishnava, especially one in the renounced order of life. We highlight here that for someone of Anirdesya Vapu dasa's seniority and stature in Mayapur, sexual relations with any person of a junior status, even an adult, is, by definition, pastoral abuse.

Our prayers go out to the victims of Anirdesya Vapu dasa, as well as their family members, friends, and others who have suffered and been impacted by his egregious acts. We pray that Lord Krishna will give you all the strength to heal from the terrible suffering you have endured, and we offer you our assistance in that healing in whatever ways we can.

The GBC is committed to uphold the decision of the CPO Panel regarding Anirdesya Vapu dasa. We direct all ISKCON authorities to be fully informed of this decision and to abide by it in its entirety (as with all CPO decisions), as it contains restrictions that must be applied internationally.

Regarding Mayapur, where the abuse occurred, we note that the Mayapur Executive Board (MEB) has also pledged to uphold the decision of the CPO. The ISKCON Sannyasa Ministry recently announced additional interim restrictions and mandates on Anirdesya Vapu dasa,

pending its own full investigation. The North American Council (NAC) has announced it will determine its own additional restrictions, as ISKCON regions are empowered to do, as per ISKCON Law and CPO Guidelines.

It should be understood that this case has surfaced decades after an initial decision against Anirdesya Vapu dasa by the CPO. In that decision, he was found responsible for the physical abuse of students under his care in Mayapur and he was restricted from teaching or managing any ISKCON school. However, we now learn that more destructive forms of abuse were later perpetrated by the same individual.

Although ISKCON has prioritized the protection of children for 25 years, this confirmation of further abuse within our international headquarters, and at the hands of a senior ISKCON sannyasi, must serve as a loud wakeup call for all ISKCON members.

We are sadly reminded of the painful events of 1996, when a dozen former gurukula students spoke to the North American GBC and Temple Presidents about the abuse they suffered in ISKCON affiliated schools in the United States and India in the 1970s and 1980s. The shock of those revelations led to the formation of the Children of Krishna organization (which assisted former students with financial grants), and soon afterwards the global ISKCON Child Protection Office. That office, under a succession of capable leaders, has done remarkable service in making ISKCON safer for children and families, in terms of training, education, adjudication of alleged abuse, and prohibiting abusers from access to our communities.

Yet, we are reminded again that it remains the duty of each one of us — GBC members, gurus, sannyasis, ministers, temple authorities, as well as individual ISKCON devotees, to be on guard to protect our vulnerable members. We must create a stronger culture of prevention of abuse, wherein all our members are safe and any suspected abuse is called out, investigated, and addressed in a transparent manner. As devotees, it is our natural assumption that no Vaishnava, especially a senior one, would commit the kinds of abominable actions that have been revealed in this case. We need to rid ourselves of such naivete.

For the devotees who have previously taken shelter of Anirdesya Vapu dasa, please know that to the extent his instructions were aligned with Srila Prabhupada, those instructions remain of benefit to you. More importantly, remember that you, and all ISKCON devotees, have an essential connection with Srila Prabhupada, our Founder-Acarya and preeminent siksa guru, who continues to guide us through his teachings, as well as engaging us in the nine processes of bhakti.

Srila Prabhupada taught us that we should not be surprised who falls away from Krishna consciousness but be surprised who stays. By this, Srila Prabhupada is reminding us to keep ourselves always close to the lotus feet of the Lord, and the instructions of our gurus, Founder-Acarya, and previous acaryas. If we do so, we shall be protected.

We note that 2023 will be the 25th Anniversary of our ISKCON Child Protection Office. For the last three years, two specific working groups comprised of GBC members, CPO representatives, attorneys, and other concerned devotees and advocates for children, have been reviewing the CPO processes to see how we can collectively improve and strengthen child protection in ISKCON. We look forward to the findings of those working groups within the next three months, and we pledge to do everything we can to strengthen and improve our child protection systems in ISKCON.

It remains the responsibility of every one of us — starting with ISKCON GBC members — to assure that our communities are safe and that our official Child Protection Policies, as well as policies against pastoral abuse and other forms of abuse, are effective and enacted to protect our children and our communities. This is the best way to expose and weed out potential abuse from within our ranks.

In closing, we again send our prayers, our thoughts, and our support to all those who have suffered abuse within ISKCON schools and communities, and especially to those impacted by this recent revelation of abuse in Mayapur. We request and encourage all ISKCON devotees who, like us, find such reports highly disturbing to become involved with your local Child Protection teams, to help improve our national and regional child protection offices, and thus support our families and children in your local areas.

May Srila Prabhupada guide us all in making ISKCON truly representative of the Vaishnava values of love, protection, and care that he taught, and expects, of us all.

Thank you.

On behalf of the ISKCON Governing Body Commission Members,

Your servants,

Bhanu Swami
Revati Raman dasa
Guru Prasad Swami,
GBC Executive Committee

Anuttama dasa,
Minister of Communications