ISKCON BOARD OF EDUCATION

International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Founder-Acharya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
3764 Watseka Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90034
Phone: (213) 837-9713 Fax: (213) 837-9703

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His Holiness Bhaktividya Purna Swami &
His Grace Naresvara das
P.O. Box 16146 Park Circus Station
Calcutta 700017
India

Dear Bhaktividya Purna Swami and Naresvara Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. Thank you very much for your recent memorandum and the report on the Mayapur child molestation investigation, which I received a few days ago.

While I am deeply grieved to hear that these incidents took place in Sri Dham Mayapur, I am relieved that the abuse has come to the surface and an attempt has been made to deal with it. It's a positive sign that several boys who were molested felt they could report the incidents that prompted this investigation. The Board of Education is especially grateful to those devotees who had the unenviable task of investigating. It's also good to hear about the steps you plan to take to prevent further occurrences. The programs of education and counselling will certainly be welcome.

While the report implies the investigation is basically complete and the situation under control, it's likely that the GBC and/or the Board of Education will want to look further into this matter because of the many serious issues raised. As the memorandum accompanying the report states, Mayapur is an international project, directly under the GBC body. A number of GBC men I have discussed the report with consider these incidents and their ramifications to be extremely grave.

The report seems thorough and conscientious. However, it also raises as many questions as it answers. I am forwarding copies of your cover letter, the report, and this letter to all Board of Education members, as well as the Chairman of the GBC.

I've spent several days reading and re-reading the report, trying to fully understand it's implications. However, not having been there and not being familiar with how things are done in Mayapur, I'm not able to come to firm conclusions. Therefore, I'm presenting a number of questions which seem to need answering, along with some points for further discussion. Would you please be kind enough to provide answers to the questions and comment on the various points I've raised?

Questions:

1) Since Mayapur is a school of special international standing, many devotees will want to know where the various perpetrators and victims were from. Please let us know which of those involved were local devotees and students, and which were foreigners.

2) Who sanctioned and took part in the beating and slapping of perpetrators and victims during the investigation?

3) As outlined in the Board of Educations publication "Preventing Child Abuse in ISKCON," children who are abused often become abusers themselves. This certainly seems to have been the case in Mayapur, as at least four generations of abuse are referred to in the report. For example, [redacted] (against whom some of the most serious accusations were made) was abused when he was a student in the Mayapur gurukula. He went on to abuse other boys, who in turn abused those younger than them. Seven of the eleven "serious perpetrators" were abused when they were younger: [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], and [redacted]. ISKCON is also concerned about persistent rumors that this kind of abuse has been going on in Mayapur for many years. The facts outlined in the report would seem to indicate that these rumors are substantially true. The Board of Education, therefore, most emphatically requests you to ascertain and name individuals who abused those named above. This is of utmost importance. Please spare no effort.

4) We've previously been told by the Mayapur gurukula administration that no unreported child abuse has occurred in the school. In the report it says that [redacted] was previously warned and did not stop. Since he was under suspicion, why was he allowed to continue in a position where he could threaten, intimidate, and abuse younger boys?

5) What is the current management structure for Mayapur and the school? Many different levels of management are referred to in the cover letter, memorandum, and report.

6) Have there been any management changes since the investigation? Are any changes planned? (It's important that ISKCON leaders know that there has not been a single <u>ashram</u> teacher in the Mayapur gurukula for a long time.)

7) Who will be organizing and doing the counselling you plan to implement? Is there any solid idea yet what kind of counselling is going to be done? The report mentions that some boys have begun counselling already. What kind of counselling are they receiving? Have the counsellors received any training? The fact that some victims were beaten seems to indicate a lack of good judgement in understanding how to deal with victims of abuse.

8) In your memorandum, you mention assistance from outside sources is needed in implementing steps to prevent further occurances. What kind of help is needed? Do you have any ideas yet where you intend to get help?

9) Paragraph 2 of the GBC Policy on Child Abuse states:

"Suspected or confirmed cases of child abuse must be reported to local government authorities for investigation and/or prosecution. In India, the ISKCON Board of Education may authorize a waiver of this requirement if the perpetrator is willing to sign a statement authorizing the Board of Education to publicize the incident to all ISKCON related educational projects, temples, and other concerned parties."

As you know, these actions are required in order to guarantee that the Board of Education will be able to notify all ISKCON institutions of the previous activities of child abusers. What has been done to comply with this resolution? Did you obtain the written waivers from the perpetrators expelled from the Mayapur community before they left?

10) Paragraph 2 of Appendix B of the report states:

"The staff of the school cooperated with the investigation. However, the general attitude of the staff toward the investigation was disturbing. Many seemed to be down-playing it's importance. Many have, as yet, failed to accept that they were neglectful in not preventing the occurrences. Many have failed to demonstrate that they have honest feelings of sympathy for the abused small children."

Please ask the investigative team to specifically name those individuals referred to in the above paragraph.

Points for Discussion:

11) Paragraph 1 of Appendix B explains why the investigation was conducted in a summary fashion. However, it seems that it's speed engendered certain abuses, i.e. beatings. In retrospect, could there have been a better way to conduct the investigation--something which would not have continued the cycle of violence, intimidation, and threats?

12) I must admit I was sickened hearing about the beatings. While I admit to not understanding the way things are done in India, these methods may have done damage to the individuals, as well as to our Society.

The credibility of confessions obtained through beating and slapping will certainly be questioned. Also, while the report mentions it is not meant for public consumption, it is unlikely that the details of the investigation will remain unknown. This could be a great embarrassment for ISKCON.

And what about the victims?

"[redacted], aged 10. Abused repeatedly by an older boy. Lied to investigators out of fear of other boys. Finally admitted after considerable slapping."

It's normal that children who have been abused will be afraid and unwilling to speak about it. After all, the abuser's modus operandi is to intimidate his victims into silence. It's hard to understand the rationale of "beating the truth" out of victims, then expelling them from the school. This is why the Board of Education recommends that investigations be done by trained personnel.

13) Your cover letter identifies the following as factors contributing to the problem: boys from low class backgrounds, a lack of qualified staffing, insufficient practical absorbing engagements, and a lack of comprehensive programs for general prevention of child abuse. However, the real cause is the community's and school's attitude of tolerance towards these activities. As stated in the report:

> "The Chairman of the Mayapur Administrative Council, Satadhanya das, openly spoke, on at least two occasions during the investigation, that he thought that too much was being made of the investigation and that these activities were normal in a boy's school."

Over the years, the school has received innumerable warnings and expressions of concern from devotees around the world. For example, in the last six months, several Board of Education members and GBC raised the question of the accusations made by ten-year-old [redacted] das. Six weeks ago, I was told that these accusations had been thoroughly investigated and evidence could not be found to substantiate them. It was suggested that [redacted] made up the incidents to convince his father to remove him from the school. Gaura Govinda Swami was told that [redacted] was "involved in a theft case and therefore allowed to leave the school." Now, after the boy was disbelieved and sent away, it turns out his accusations were true.

Most devotees I have spoken to who have heard about the investigation make comments like, "Everyone's known these things have been going on for years." As you know, the Board of Education repeatedly warned the school about the likelihood of contamination amongst the older boys.

I think there are few devotees who would agree with your statement, "58 boys and the entire teaching staff and administrative staff were cleared of involvement." While no evidence may have turned up that the school staff was involved in illicit sexual activities, the investigators were clearly concerned about the attitude of the school staff. It seems there was, and continues to be, an abject lack of a sense of responsibility for abuse inflicted on children under their care. Considering the ample warnings and concerns expressed over the years, the administrators involved are, at the very least, guilty of negligence.

14) Considering the wide-spread nature of the corruption in the school, it's hard to believe it went on for so long while the school staff remained completely oblivious. Candrasekhara, as a trusted confident of the students, should have known a large percentage of the circumstances described in the report. According to the report, he warned students to stay away from [redacted]. Paragraph 3 of the GBC regulations says:

"All suspected or confirmed incidents of child abuse must be reported immediately to the local GBC secretary, and within thirty days, to the ISKCON Board of Education."

It would seem that Bhaktividya Purna Maharaja, through his close connection with Candrasekhara, would have ample opportunity to ascertain the truth when confronted with allegations. Furthermore, the investigative committee's statement, "Some boys stated that when they reported incidents to the school authorities they were punished along with the perpetrators of those incidents," indicates unreported suspected abuse. This is particularly serious in light of Paragraph 8 of the GBC regulations which states, in part:

"Should the GBC body find a GBC man or other ISKCON manager responsible for suppressing or covering up complaints of child abuse, or supporting intimidation of those who might complain, the GBC man shall be open to censure or probation, and the ISKCON manager shall be open to appropriate disciplinary action."

I recognize that the implications of, and the repercussions from, the above points may be quite serious. However, the GBC and Temple Presidents of ISKCON have made it clear they want a "zero-tolerance policy" in regard to child abuse. I hope open and honest discussion will lead to a thorough "clearing of the air" and prevention of such occurrences in the future. It's necessary that these points continue to be discussed until our Society is completely satisfied that such abuse is no longer possible in Mayapur.

I sincerely hope you will not view the Board of Education or myself as "enemies" because these points are pressed. I've several times mentioned to Bhaktividya Purna Maharaja that the support of the Society will be luke-warm until concerns in this area are eliminated. Clearing up these issues is an absolute necessity for the continued welfare of the Mayapur gurukula.

I look forward to your answers and comments on the above points. The Board of Education and the GBC will undoubtedly consider the matter further after your reply.

Hope this meets you in good health and Krishna consciousness.

Your servant,

Sri Rama das

Sri Rama das
Chairman