



ISKCON
GBC

Communications



GBC Meeting Highlights Report

| January 3, 2025

We are pleased to present the 3 January 2025 GBC Meeting Highlights Report. This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the online GBC meeting highlighting the key topics discussed.

The meeting commenced with a welcome to all members by Guru Prasad Swami, followed by Madhusevita Das reading from a lecture on Srimad Bhagavatam by Srila Prabhupada on 24 May 1973 in London, England.

The following key topics were discussed:

1. GBC Emeritus Status for Malati Devi

Guru Prasad Swami offered appreciation for Malati Devi's years of service to ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada, and the GBC. The GBC body proposed offering GBC Emeritus status to Malati Devi, who resigned from GBC services on 31 December 2024.

The GBC body voted to confer GBC Emeritus status on Malati Devi in appreciation for her decades of service to the GBC body.

The title of GBC Emeritus is awarded by the GBC body to honour retired members who have rendered distinguished service to ISKCON and the GBC Body.

2. Enhanced Approach for Child Protection in ISKCON

Improving child protection efforts and outcomes is a key priority for both the GBC and ISKCON leaders. This is a priority topic for the GBC with several meetings dedicated to this topic in the past year.

ISKCON has made significant strides in strengthening child protection policies, informed by expert-led reviews and investigations. This specifically relates to ISKCON's ecclesiastical responsibilities for child safeguarding. All ISKCON entities are required to comply with relevant civil and criminal processes.

The GBC discussed advancing the implementation of the policy (the policy remains unchanged) by introducing an enhanced approach to child protection ensuring the effective implementation of safeguards across ISKCON in a more sustainable manner. The GBC recognizes that:

- Child protection is a priority for ISKCON, thus aligning with its core values of spiritual and organizational integrity.
- ISKCON's global activities and presence (1200+ entities) requires a more comprehensive approach to implementing ISKCONs child protection policy.
- Leadership teams at all levels must be empowered with resources, training, and clear accountability to ensure proper implementation of ISKCONs child protection policy.
- There should be a clear separation of concerns between activities for the prevention of abuse from case-related matters. Further, investigations need to be distinct from adjudications, which are distinct from appeals.
- Localized ownership, inclusive of funding is necessary to ensure sustainable resource allocation while maintaining alignment with local and regional needs and responsibilities.
- A blended approach (top-down and bottom-up) is essential to build awareness, reduce risks, and foster a culture of safety.

In support of this enhanced approach, the GBC has approved the establishment of the Child Protection Oversight Committee (CPOC). The CPOC is a GBC-nominated committee mandated to ensure that appropriate policies, structures and processes are in place for effective child protection — and that these are sufficiently implemented and adhered to. Importantly the CPOC maintains **no** direct involvement in cases, adjudications and appeals, maintaining its objectivity as a supervisory authority.

The GBC voted to appoint this committee, which is staffed by experienced professionals who will oversee the global implementation of child protection measures. The governance and oversight functions of

the current ICPO will transition to the Child Protection Oversight Committee.

The implementation of this enhanced approach will be led by the respective Regional Governing Bodies (RGB) and the CPOC. ISKCON's Justice Minister will serve as the transitional CPO Director for a period of 3 to 6 months, starting 1 March 2025, providing international coverage where required, as RGBs implement the enhanced approach.

The GBC is mindful of the extent of these changes and the potential risks associated with a more decentralised approach. The GBC will closely monitor the implementation and adjust where necessary. There will be a formal review in six months and annually thereafter.

The key outcomes of the enhanced approach once fully implemented are:

A Unified Global Policy:

ISKCONs Child Protection Policy is a single, global policy that applies uniformly across all ISKCON entities, fostering consistency and accountability.

Prevention as a Core Principle:

Preventative measures will be at the heart of ISKCONs child protection efforts. By equipping communities, leaders, and families with the tools to recognize and mitigate risks, ISKCON seeks to nurture a culture of safety, resilience, and proactive care.

Decentralized Accountability with Clear Oversight:

Child protection responsibilities are distributed across three lines:

- First Line: Local leadership teams are tasked with implementing safeguards
- Second Line: Experts provide guidance and resources to local teams
- Third Line: Oversight teams ensure compliance and effectiveness

National councils and Regional Governing Bodies (RGBs) will oversee implementation, ensuring localized accountability supported by global standards.

Independent Investigations:

Cases of abuse will be investigated by independent, third-party experts. This guarantees impartiality and adherence to ecclesiastical and legal obligations.

Regional Adjudication and Transparent Appeals :

Adjudication will occur regionally, following approved guidelines, with appeals conducted separately and independently. ISKCON is committed to transparent justice processes where restrictions and mitigations align with the severity of abuse and are consistently applied across regions. The adjudication and appeal teams will be established by the RGBs.

Support for Victims:

ISKCON will prioritize the spiritual and emotional recovery of individuals affected by abuse. This includes providing counselling, spiritual guidance, and resources to support healing while equipping victims with the tools and knowledge that will help them navigate the reporting and other processes.

Sustainable Funding:

To ensure the longevity and scalability of these efforts, child protection initiatives will be funded locally, promoting stronger ownership and alignment with local and regional needs.

Guru Prasad Swami stated, "The safety and well-being of children is a sacred responsibility. With the establishment of the Child Protection Oversight Committee, staffed by experienced legal professionals with secular experience and expertise in dealing with child protection and prosecution, and a managed transition to this enhanced approach of implementing our child protection policy, we are ensuring that ISKCON creates a safe, nurturing environment for children."

The GBC Communications office will share more information on implementation, transition, and other aspects in the next weeks.

*Appendix A : Overview of CPOC and details of the CPOC members

The Child Protection Office Oversight Committee (CPOC) is tasked by the GBC with enhancing the governance and operations of ISKCON's child protection initiatives. It was formed based on the GBC Body's resolution on March 9, 2024, and its members were appointed by unanimous vote by the GBC on August 7, 2024, to ensure CPO policies and procedures are properly followed, now and into the future.

The CPOC does not participate in any adjudications and/or investigations, nor does it handle any cases directly. It reports directly to the GBC's Executive Committee.

The CPOC is currently composed of three members and is supported by a secretary. There is scope for two additional members to join; an independent member who is not affiliated with ISKCON and another expert.

The CPOC, at this early stage of its functioning, is focusing on developing communication strategies, administrative readiness, and overseeing the seamless transition to the new structure, ensuring continuity and alignment with the revised objectives as ratified by GBC and Spiritual Advisors Bhagavata Assembly (SABHA).

The CPOC comprises the following members (in alphabetical order):

Atmarama Das

Atmarama Das is a distinguished human rights advocate and public health attorney with an extensive multidisciplinary background in international and sub-national consultancy, policy development, and legal expertise in the faith-based, social, public, and private sectors. Recognized as a Partner and NGO Legal Expert by the International Center for Non-Profit Law (ICNL), Washington DC, and a Country Expert on Philanthropy by the Hudson Institute, USA, Atmarama Das excels in strategic advocacy, governance, and organizational leadership. He served ISKCON in various capacities in Nigeria, India, Kenya, and South Africa including for some years as Temple President in Enugu, Nigeria and Johannesburg, South Africa. He is a member of the ISKCON Global Duty Office, Legal Affairs, and the Director of Legal Services, ISKCON Global Property Office (IGPO).

Govinda Lilamrita Devi

Govinda Lilamrita Devi is an accomplished legal professional and academic with expertise in family, criminal, immigration, and international human rights law. She holds the title of Doctor of Juridical Science ("S.J.D.") in Health Law from Delaware

Law School (Wilmington, USA). She holds a Master's degree from Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law (New York, USA). She has significant experience managing legal projects, mentoring legal professionals, and advocating for vulnerable populations, including adults and children who have experienced severe trauma. She currently supervises and manages an interdisciplinary practice between social workers, forensic psychiatrists, and legal professionals. She has received extensive training and presented seminars on trauma-informed lawyering and the representation of individuals who have suffered emotional and physical abuse, including rape.

She was recently appointed as an Associate Clinical Professor and aspires to write and publish using Srila Prabhupada's books as a reference and guide.

Govinda Lilamrita Devi joined ISKCON in 2016 in New York, US and serves at 26 Second Avenue and Gita Nagari Farm. She was involved in giving legal advice, preaching, book distribution, and managing services, as well as other services. Govinda Lilamrita has been involved in service with the CPO Review Committee. She is the GBC-appointed Chair and Convener of the Child Protection Oversight Committee.

Rasesvari Radhika Devi

Rasesvari Radhika Devi Dasi was called to the Bar in England and Wales in 2017 and admitted to the Bar in Mauritius in 2018. As a criminal lawyer, she gained extensive experience working with children as both witnesses and accused. In 2012, she was appointed District Magistrate, where she regularly handled juvenile cases, including offenses ranging from assault and sexual offenses to homicide.

She also worked on Child Beyond Control cases and dealt with crimes against child victims as an Intermediate Court Magistrate in the Criminal Division. Rasesvari has participated in continuous training on topics such as Gender-Based Violence, Child Protection, and Judicial Ethics. Currently, as Principal State Counsel at the Attorney General's Office, she works in the Human Rights Unit and contributed to the 2024 review of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She is also involved in drafting the new Children's Bill.

Rasesvari Radhika Devi has been an active ISKCON member since 1992, serving in the Deity Department at Sri Sri Krsna Balaram Mandir, Mauritius. She is dedicated to distributing Srila Prabhupada's books, particularly the Bhagavad-gita, to legal professionals and the business community. She also contributes to child protection as a member of the Mauritius CPO. With 16 years of experience in justice administration, including roles as Counsel for the Prosecution, Magistrate, and Principal State Counsel, she was appointed by the GBC to the CPO Oversight Committee in 2024.