

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FPB welcomes the 12 life sentences handed to Mr Gerhard Ackerman on charges of possession of child pornography

14 August 2023, Centurion. The Film and Publication Board (FPB) welcomes the 12 life sentences handed to Mr Gerhard Ackerman on charges of possession of child pornography by the South Gauteng High Court today, 14 August 2023. The FPB played a crucial role in conducting analyses of the images found in possession of Mr Ackerman, which were crucial in his successful prosecution.

The South Gauteng High Court accepted the FPB's content analysis report drafted by the Child Protection Team. Both the State and the Defence Lawyer adopted the content analysis report and confirmed its accuracy without any amendments. The charges were brought against Mr Ackerman according to the Films and Publications Act 56 of 1996, as amended, which makes the creation, possession and distribution of child pornography as well as exploitation of children for this purpose, a criminal offence. 386 images found in his possession were confirmed to be Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM).

"We warmly welcome the heavy sentence and hope it sends a strong warning to other offenders out there that we, together with the Law Enforcement agencies and other partners, will sniff them out of the corners wherever they are hiding. We shall never rest until each one of them are behind bars. This is also a historic moment for the FPB as an online content regulator. We wish to congratulate our Child Protection team for working tirelessly in providing quality reports to court, resulting in this prosecution," says Chief Executive Officer of the FPB, Dr Mashilo Boloka.

He continues to say, "In our pursuit of eradicating the scourge of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), we employ internationally certified content analysts who are trained to ascertain whether people depicted in suspected content are in indeed children. FPB Child Protection Officers are trained on Safety and Risk Assessment in the field of Child Protection and are Certified Content Analysts. The rise of the digital space has made the work of the FPB and Law Enforcement in fighting CSAM particularly challenging. Sexual predators find an anonymous home on the internet where it is easy to build a persona that is very different from reality that can be used to exploit others".

The FPB works in partnership with like-minded organisations in South Africa and around the world to close in on the perpetrators of these heinous crimes against children. Working through the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) and their links to the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol), the FPB is able to track CSAM that has been created or distributed through international syndicates and finds its way to South African online perpetrators.

The problem of child sexual abuse and CSAM is insidious and requires the vigilance of everyone in society to curb it. The long-term psychological damage to an abused child is multiplied when the images which have been circulated online are easily accessed. Members of the South African public are urged to report any suspected exploitation or grooming of children or instances of suspected CSAM in circulation to hotline@fpb.org.za

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For media queries or interviews please contact:

Ms Manala Botolo

Assistant Manager: Communications and Marketing

Email: manala.botolo@fpb.org.za

Mobile: 082 860 6748

Notes to the editor

The objective of the Act of 1996 is to regulate the creation, production, possession and distribution of films, games and certain publications, and more recently certain online content. This is done to provide consumer advice to enable adults to make informed viewing, reading, and gaming choices for themselves and children in their care; to protect children from exposure to disturbing and harmful material and from premature exposure to adult experiences, and to make the use of children in, and the exposure of children to pornography, punishable.

Paramount to the mandate of the FPB is the protection of children. Protecting children under the Act is a proportional balancing of the rights afforded in the South African Constitution against the right of the child. Children have the right to be protected from physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or moral harm and to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation.

It further ensures that children's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning a child.