



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement / Letter to the Editor

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Authorities must ensure that high-rise building balconies are safe for children

There is a video going around on social media showing a girl who appears to be 7 to 8 years old, who has climbed over the balcony railing onto the ledge of a high-rise building (presumably a flat) and proceeds to walk back and forth on the ledge. The girl is doing this on what seems to be the tenth or eleventh floor of the building. A short while later, she seems to hear a sound and hurriers, with some difficulty, to climb over the railing to get back onto the balcony.

This video is showing something that is very real and horrifying. One wrong move and the child could have plummeted to her death. What is worrying is that this probably happens more often than we realise.

We need to accept the reality that there will always be families with small children living in high-rise buildings, such as flats, because of financial constraints. We also need to understand that parents cannot be watching their children 24/7; and that children, being always curious about things, will not always listen and obey their parents about the things they have been told not to do. All a parent needs to do is to go to another room (not even leave the house) and their child could get into things that have been explicitly forbidden. For instance, we do not know the whole situation with the girl in the video, but the way she hurries to get over the railing and back onto the balcony indicates that she probably has been told to not climb the railing and knows she is doing something she is not supposed to do.

So what is the solution then? In October 2018 the then Minister of Housing and Local Government, Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin, said that the ministry would be looking into implementing new safety measures at high-rise buildings after several fatal tragedies involving children falling from the upper floors of buildings. According to Datuk Zuraida (as stated in news articles) the Uniform Building By-Laws 1984 (UBBL 1984) has set that balcony railings (of tall buildings) cannot be less than 1 metre high. She also stated that she does not want houses to feel like prison (by making the railings too high) but the ministry would relook the structure to see whether specifications need to be changed.

The Consumers' Association of Penang asks what has the Ministry of Housing and Local Government done about this since this statement was made in late 2018? We believe that to avoid any tragedies involving children and balconies from happening, safety measures must be integrated into the structure of the building itself. As we can see from the video, the girl can climb over the railing onto the balcony ledge, meaning the balconies of that building are not safe. The ministry needs to investigate this immediately and implement effective safety measures to protect the children living in high-rise buildings.

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