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Ministry urged to get union's views in fight against ills

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The National Union of Teaching Profession secretary-general N. Siva Subramaniam urged the Education Ministry today to perceive the union as a crucial ally in the war against moral decadence in schools.

To find the solutions the ministry, he said, must listen to the views and experiences of those who come in contact with the problem everyday, and not just the policy-makers.

The NUTP, said Siva, with 68,000 members, should be the body representing the views and sentiments of the teachers in the ministry's campaign against social ills.

"I believe it's the people at the grassroots who are more aware of the gravity of the situation, and why it has grown to such proportions."

That, and the fact, he added, that the union has had its finger on the main pulse of this problem since it first surfaced more than two decades ago.

"In 1973, when we first realised that indiscipline was becoming a major problem in schools, the NUTP conducted a seminar on this subject and discussed measures to combat these ills.

"We even submitted our proposals to the ministry, then run by Datuk Musa Hitam. But nothing came out of that, and only now 24 years later we are beginning to tackle it," he said.

Citing ineffective heads of schools who had failed to play the role as disciplinarians as one of the main contributors to this problem, Siva said it was time for the ministry to review the mode of appointing principals.

He said it was imperative for principals to be effective disciplinarians.

To support this theory, Siva drew reference to one such case in point.

"Not too long ago, students from the Huah Lian Secondary School in Taiping were caught smuggling weapons like parang, daggers, and knives into the school.

"The ministry then appointed Ong Teow Liang as the principal of the school to correct the problem. Three years later, it was not only the most disciplined school in the State, but produced the best SPM and STPM results in the country."

Which is why, Siva said, it would be necessary for the ministry to find out why some schools faced a serious problem with discipline and some did not.

While agreeing that parenting skills played a major role in this campaign, Siva said disciplinarians in schools had just as crucial a part to play in combating moral decadence.

Believing that the number of social problems reported understates the severity of the situation, Siva said it was time principals stopped nurturing a false sense of security and tackle the problem more realistically.

"I support Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for principals to be honest about the problem and confront it in the open.

"To be able to solve the problem, we must first acknowledge that it exists and it has reached the danger level," added Siva.

He also said that it was surprising to note that even after the Government had spent so much of money on religious studies and moral education, moral decadence in schools has become a predominant issue today.

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