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Twelve teenagers to attend UN session on children in New York

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Twelve teenagers chosen to attend the three-day United Nations Special Session on Children will leave for New York on Thursday.

They will participate in programmes organised by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef).

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said the teenagers were chosen based on their leadership skills, extra curricular activities, command of English and talents.

She said knowledge of current affairs and the workings of the UN were also instrumental in the selection process, which was done by a committee comprising officials from the ministry and the Education Ministry.

Siti Zaharah said the children had different backgrounds and represented the various races.

She said a few more teenagers would also be going to New York on their own accord through the assistance of non-governmental organisations.

She will lead the Malaysian delegation that comprises officials from the ministry, Education, Human Resources and Health Ministries, the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department and NGOs.

The teenagers will be given a briefing tomorrow on the role they will be playing, besides listening to feedback from others who had attended similar events.

"This will give them a clear idea on what to expect when they arrive there. We do not want them to be overwhelmed by the atmosphere," said Siti Zaharah.

She said in addition to the official General Assembly proceedings there were dozens of side events and activities planned around the Special Session, that starts on Sept 19.

She said among the programmes were a forum on young people orientation, a session on action plans on what happens after the Special Session, an outreach project and a media consortium.

Among those going to the Special Session will be two children from the Golden Kids Club. Siti Zaharah said they would be attending the media consortium which aimed to train participants on journalism skills and how to cover the Special Session.

She said the outreach project was divided into two areas - kids corner and neighbourhood concert.

"This project would introduce the participants to the lifestyle of New York children."

Siti Zaharah said the experience of attending the Special Session would benefit all and hoped it would help boost the "Say Yes for Children" campaign, launched on Sept 1 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The "Say Yes for Children" campaign is part of a global crusade to enable children and adults to speak out on ways to improve the lives of children.

It is built on 10 imperatives. They are "leave no child", "put children first", "care for every child", "fight HIV/AIDS", "stop harming and exploiting children", "listen to children", "educate every child", "protect children from war", "protect the earth for children" and "fight poverty: invest in children".

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