

Human trafficking now a serious problem
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Human trafficking, particularly of women into the country, is getting serious and the government has been urged to pay more attention to the problem.

"Although there is no official figures to show the seriousness of human trafficking in the country, the situation is alarming as more and more cases are being brought to our attention", said Wong Su Zane, a full-time social worker with the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO).

There is no doubt that Wong is familiar with the subject as her work with WAO involves dealing directly with victims of those illegally brought into the country.

"Another alarming factor is that the victims are also getting younger and younger," she told a seminar on human trafficking in Kuala Lumpur last night.

"Teenagers as young as 14 are among the victims of trafficking and they would later be forced to become sex workers," Wong said at the seminar titled 'The 21st Century Slave Trade: Stop the Trafficking, a Transborder Crime against Humanity'.

The event was jointly organised by the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall civil rights committee, Women's Section and workers' rights group Tenaganita.

Duped by agents

In most cases, Wong said the victims were duped by agents who trafficked them into Malaysia on the pretext of finding them gainful employment but they were later forced to be sex workers and servants.

"They were hoping to get jobs as factory workers and domestic helpers as promised by their agents but when they arrived in the country, the agents forced them to turn to immoral earnings," she explained.

Wong said that the victims usually enter the country as tourists or domestic workers where they will have a temporary permit to stay in Malaysia.

Their agents will also provide them with some money to prove to immigration officials that they have the means to stay in the country, she added.

At one point in her talk, Wong had tears in her eyes when she related how she witnessed the suffering and pain of some of the victims who sought help from WAO.

"The most depressing part is public perception that the victims deserve what they get as they came into the country to make money through illegal and immoral means," she said.

Legislation necessary

Lending support to Wong's call, TenagaNita director Dr Irene Fernandez who also spoke at the seminar said it was high time for the government to address the issue of human trafficking as it was getting more serious..

She reiterated that in Malaysia, there are no laws to protect victims of human trafficking.

"What the government is using now against the traffickers are Restricted Residents Act and Emergency Ordinance and these acts are not appropriate to address the problem," Fernandez said.

"We need a Anti-Trafficking Act to fight and stop this industry before the situation turns from bad to worse.

"Apart from the government, the public should also play their role in curbing the problem by informing the authorities of any human trafficking activity they may come across," she added.

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