

Unicef urges Malaysia to improve adoption process
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The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) has come out in support of Malaysia's pledge to review adoption laws and process in view of reports that the country is a hub for the illicit baby trade.

In a statement today, Unicef representative to Malaysia Marianne Clark-Hattingh said currently, there were "multiple roadblocks" faced by potential adoptive parents, which drives the demand for the sale of children.

"Lengthy adoption processes, alleged cases of corruption and reported misuse of power by some state officials and private health workers can only result in more couples seeking alternative routes to adoption, providing a fertile ground for syndicates to thrive," Clark-Hattingh said.

She was responding to a recent exposé by the 101 East programme on *Al-Jazeera*, which claimed that there was a thriving baby-selling industry operating in Malaysia.

Clark-Hattingh said Unicef also advocates for the birth registration of children who are not registered.

"Without a birth certificate, children in Malaysia are at higher risk of being trafficked or trapped by child-for-sale syndicates.

"Unicef stands ready to further support the efforts of the Malaysian authorities to keep children safer and better informed," she said.

Family-based care approach

Clark-Hattingh also suggested that Malaysia improves access to age-appropriate sex education for children and youths to increase their understanding of issues regarding sexuality.

"Parent-child communication about relationships, sex and sexuality are also crucial so that children can make well-informed choices and feel comfortable to turn to their parents in times of difficulty or danger," she said.

She said Unicef believes that improving the adoption process and prioritising the family-based care approach for children who are currently living without guardians would be in the best interest of the affected children.

She warned that the sale of children threatened to undermine Malaysia's social-economic progress and was contrary to many principles underlining the 11th Malaysia Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to *Al-Jazeera*, baby-selling is rife in Malaysia, involving corrupt doctors, the National Registration Department and other authorities.

Thus far, the authorities have claimed that the allegations were blown out of proportion and have **pledged to investigate** the matter.

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