

Malaysia does not want to be a refugee magnet
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Malaysia will not officially recognise refugees for fears that the country would turn into a hub for political dissidents and illegal migrants in the region.

In view of this, the Foreign Ministry said it does not plan to ratify the United Nations (UN) Convention in relation to the Status of Refugees (1951) and Protocol (1967).

"The government is of the opinion that if Malaysia becomes party to the Convention, considering its strategic geographical location in the region, it would be a drawing factor for refugees to come to Malaysia," the ministry's parliamentary secretary Shabery Cheek told the Dewan Rakyat today.

He was replying to Dr Junaidy Abd Wahab (BN-Batu Pahat) who asked if Malaysia plans to ratify all the UN conventions concerning human rights, in addition to the convention concerning refugees.

Malaysia is party to two of UN's seven conventions that cover human rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The conventions were ratified in 1995.

Humanitarian grounds

Shabery said despite the non-ratification, the government has intervened on several occasions.

"The government has given help to parties according to a case by case basis on humanitarian grounds. It is just not done on the whole," he added.

However, he did not rule out the possibility of Malaysia reconsidering its position in the future

"... the Foreign Ministry has and is studying several of the main treaties, towards the participation of those treaties without bringing harm to the sovereignty and security of the country and at the same time will not compromise the policies and cultural characteristics of the nation," he said.

Shabery said the Foreign Ministry and the Home Ministry have co-operated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) concerning refugees in the country.

"It creates several problems in terms of our image because we are perceived to be late in ratifying several of the conventions ... however there are countries that have ratified the conventions, including many in Africa, that have questionable human rights records," he added.

He said that several cultural aspects might slow the country in ratifying the conventions.

"There are several reasons, related to our laws for example. Are we ready to discard them?

"Some aspects that have to do with our Federal Constitution, such as the special rights of the Malays, do we want to do away with them? These are the factors that we feel slows the process of ratifying all the conventions," he added.

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