

## Amend law to punish locals doing it overseas

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Those who engage in sex with kids abroad not punished here now  
IT IS not an offence for Singaporeans to have sex with children overseas, as far as local laws are concerned.

Social activists are calling for a change in this law.

It is neither fair nor right to protect our own children and yet allow Singaporeans to get away scot-free after sexually exploiting kids elsewhere in the region, say those interviewed. In recent years, at least 30 countries, including Australia, the United States and Britain, have passed laws that allow for the prosecution, in the home country, of citizens who have sex with minors overseas.

For example, if an American is known to have gone to buy sex with children overseas, he can be tried by US courts when he returns to the US.

This is crucial because in some countries where child-sex tourism is said to be rampant, corruption, lax policing and the child-sex tourist's short stay in the country makes it hard to nab the offender.

Hence, womens' groups Aware and Unifem (Singapore) are calling for such laws here too. The issue came up as early as 1995, and again last year, in Parliament.

Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng had last year cited practical and legal difficulties as reasons why local laws were not amended to allow for extra-territorial jurisdiction to deter local child-sex tourists.

He said: 'It's not just a matter of enacting a provision in our statutes to make it an offence for Singaporeans to have sex with minors overseas.'

'Difficult legal issues arise in extending our jurisdiction overseas.'

Practical problems Mr Wong cited then include detecting such acts and the question of Singapore's police conducting investigations overseas.

The issue was highlighted again this week when a Singaporean lecturer was nabbed in Bangkok for allegedly trying to buy sex with underage boys.

Lawyers and social activists interviewed however are not convinced that enforcing such laws is difficult.

Prominent lawyer Subhas Anandan said Singaporeans who take drugs elsewhere are charged when they come home to Singapore.

For example, if the drug offender is not jailed overseas, he can be jailed when he returns to Singapore. This is not considered double jeopardy.

However, Mr Anandan felt that the offender should not be convicted in two countries. It is not fair to punish a man twice, he said.

But as Tampines GRC MP Sin Boon Ann put it: 'Singaporeans must not think that just because they are overseas, they won't be called upon to answer for what they did.'

'We can put it very strongly to them by shaming them, and show them that it's unacceptable.'