



## **Netting child-sex tourists; More than 1,300 petition online to change S'pore law to prosecute perpetrators back home**

TDAYSG0020051012e1ad00032

NSL

Jasmine Yinjasmine.yin@newstoday.com.sg

515 Words

13 October 2005

TODAY (Singapore)

AM N PM

12

English

(c) 2005. MediaCorp Press Ltd.

IT is a subject whispered about but that has not been debated in detail until now. If a Singaporean paedophile goes overseas to exploit children, should he be prosecuted here on the evidence emerging?

An online petition seeks this. It asks the Government to "make it a criminal offence to engage in sexual activity with anyone below 18 years of age while overseas".

More than 1,300 people have signed the petition and those who have thrown in their support include high-profile businesswoman Nanz Chong-Komo and social activist Dr Kanwaljit Soin.

The petition has struck a common chord across different sectors of society.

Signatory Zara Tania, 17, commented: "I am very much a child myself and it really irks me that such preposterous acts are going on overseas."

Started three weeks ago by volunteers from women's group Unifem Singapore, the petition seeks more public education for those who travel abroad to poor communities for sex with children. They need to be told they are not "helping them to make a living" and that such acts "take advantage of their victims' poverty, marginalisation and lack of protection".

The petition also says that businesses in the tourism and entertainment sectors should "not turn a blind eye" to the possibility that their facilities might be used for such exploitation. "Whether they are hotels, tour agents, ferry operators or budget carriers, we must work with them to raise awareness among their customers," Unifem's president Melissa Kwee told Today. "Obviously, we want to promote tourism - it creates jobs and cultural awareness - but not child-sex tourism."

She cited the Accor international chain of hotels, which has, among other initiatives, trained more than 5,000 of its staff members worldwide to recognise and prevent child-sex activities since 2002.

In its Novotel Bangkok hotel at Siam Square, stickers on child-sex tourism are displayed in 429 hotel rooms.

The petition also calls for the Government to step in and make sex with children overseas a criminal offence.

Signatory Sumy Menon said: "If the Government can prosecute Singaporeans and permanent residents who go abroad and take drugs, then surely we can stop this (sexual exploitation of children)."

Ms Kwee said she hoped the Government would take note of the petition and the fact that many people in Singapore "care a lot to want to make a difference".

But there are legal and practical difficulties with such a proposal, as was pointed out by Senior Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs Ho Peng Kee in Parliament in May. They include detection, carrying out an overseas investigation and bringing witnesses here to give

evidence.

The Home Affairs Ministry said it is reviewing the Penal Code, which includes studying the feasibility of enacting such a law in Singapore. The review would be completed by the end of the year.

The petition can be viewed at <http://www.petitiononline.com/ChildSex/petition.html>.