

## Govt funds anti-child sex tourism move

STIMES0020060321e23m0000u

Singapore

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519 Words

22 March 2006

Straits Times

English

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Women's groups to hand out public education fliers at travelfair  
CAMPAIGNERS are turning up the heat on paedophiles who make sex

trips to neighbouring countries to prey on children.

They are taking their message to this weekend's National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (Natas) Travel Fair, where a flier campaign by the Government and its community partners hopes to educate and encourage the public to help act against child sex tourists.

Volunteers at the three-day fair will distribute fliers with the sobering message: 'If you are travelling to have sex with children, everyone will be watching.'

It warns potential offenders: 'There's no escape for child sex tourists.'

That is the message from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), and women's advocacy groups Unifem Singapore, Association of Women for Action and Research, and Women Make a Difference.

Said Unifem's Ms Saleemah Ismail: 'Anyone who travels can play a part to stop child sex tourism.'

'They can choose to be vigilant and report suspected abuses when they see one. Or they can choose not to.'

'We hope by being aware of the issue, they will choose to report.'

MCYS is funding the awareness campaign and hopes the public will take a strong stand against child sex tourism.

Said an MCYS spokesman: 'It is our hope that the message of responsible tourism will educate and empower the public to take action through a better understanding of the issues, and encourage others to take a strong stand against child sex tourism.'

The campaign marks the first time MCYS has joined hands with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to raise awareness of the problem. And the Government-NGO partnership is a significant tie-up, said NGOs interviewed.

Singaporean men have become notorious for travelling to the Indonesian island of Batam for cheap sex with girls as young as 14.

Batam social workers said a significant number of young girls throughout Indonesia have been tricked into the flesh trade, with false promises of jobs like waitressing.

NGOs here have urged the authorities to curb this sexual

exploitation of minors for years, and the Government responded by announcing earlier this month that it will change the law to prosecute Singaporeans who travel abroad for sex with minors, when they return home.

This is to send a strong signal that the Government is against this 'abhorrent act', said Senior Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs Ho Peng Kee. The landmark move will kick in when the review of the Penal Code is completed, although no date has been set yet.

The MCYS spokesman said the Natas fair, which expects 50,000 visitors from Friday to Sunday, is only one platform to promote awareness of the issue. For instance, the ministry also hopes to persuade travel operators to display the fliers at their offices. The initiative is part of the regional education campaign by Asean countries to fight the scourge of child sex tourism. For more information, go to <http://www.stopchildsex.org.sg>