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NATIONAL

DNA identification to prevent trafficking

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Indonesia's Eijkman Institute, in cooperation with international project DNA-ProKids, says it would join the fight against child trafficking through DNA identification.

"Human trafficking is a global problem," Eijkman Institute deputy director Herawati Sudoyo said Thursday during a seminar in Jakarta on the use of DNA to identify children.

The Eijkman DNA project works by comparing a missing child's DNA with their parents' and preventing illegal adoptions, which could lead to trafficking.

Herawati said the institute used scientific data to prove incidents of child trafficking.

She cited an example of the use of DNA identification following the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010 when 25 children were moved to Bolivia by people who could not prove their parenthood.

However, Bolivian Police intercepted them on their way to Brazil and Argentina by using DNA identification to prove the biological relationship between the "parents" and children.

Herawati said 13 children were reunited with their biological parents thanks to DNA identification while the rest remained in Bolivia before being handed over to the Haitian government.

Herawati said another way to prevent child trafficking was by preventing children from being adopted illegally.

"We can check the biological relationship between the children to be adopted with the relatives who give them up for adoption," she said, adding that DNA-ProKids would work with the police and the Commission on Child Protection.

"The police and the commission can refer children trafficking cases to ProKids," Herawati said.

"We can start as soon as we receive the cases from the police."

Comr. Khatarina Ekorini Indriati from women and children protection unit of the National Police said people should report to the police first and when it had become a police case, the police would refer it to DNA-ProKids.

"DNA-ProKids doesn't charge to do a DNA identification," she said

Two reasons behind the high rate of child trafficking in Indonesia was poverty and high population growth.

Khatarina cited an example of a pedicab driver who had seven children and sold some of them for between Rp 150,000 (US\$16.65) and Rp 450,000 (US\$49.95) to strangers.

"These people were probably child traffickers," she said.

Khatarina added that trafficked children could be economically and sexually exploited.

DNA-ProKids is an international humanity project established in 2004 as an initiative of the University of Granada Genetic Identification Laboratory, in collaboration with the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification.

Since 2004, Eijkman Institute has provided DNA identification service to help the National Police forensics for crimes. (map)

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