

The Jakarta Post

Wednesday, October 06, 2010 15:44 PM

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NATIONAL

DNA testing a proven weapon in fight against human trafficking

The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Wed, 10/06/2010 9:58 AM | National

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DNA testing is a proven aid in solving child trafficking cases in the country, a well-known international research institute says.

DNA identification unit chief for Indonesia's Eijkman Institute for Molecular Biology, Dr. Herawati Sudoyo, said Monday that the institute had used DNA identification technology to assist a police investigation into a child trafficking case in Palembang, South Sumatra, in August.

On Aug. 25, the Palembang police found eight babies in a locked, rundown house in Sekup Bendung in Palembang. Contrary to its poor condition, the house was equipped with four CCTV cameras and dozens of beds. It is thought the house was being used as a temporary nursery for children who were to be sold or trafficked.

"In collaboration with the police forensics team, we collected the DNA of the eight infants found there to verify their biological relationships," Herawati said.

She said the owner of the house, a man aged 46, said relatives and friends had entrusted some of their babies to him, and that some of the babies were his own children.

"In the process of DNA identification for this type of case, there are always two main questions that we ask. The first is whether the children involved actually belong to the parents located on the scene, and the second is whether they are related to each other biologically," she told The Jakarta Post.

"However, through the DNA identification technology, the man's claim was refuted. It was proven that none of the babies was his or biologically related to one another," Herawati said.

The Palembang case was not the first in which Eijkman assisted the police in a child trafficking case.

In 2005, the institute helped reunite a mother with her child who had been kidnapped. The child found with three other infants in an abandoned house in Jakarta.

The institute — one of the few research centers in the country that has a DNA databank — said it is committed to international project DNA-ProKids, a global initiative run by the University of Granada's Genetic Identification Laboratory in Spain, and the Human Identification Center at the University of North Texas in the United States.

Jose A. Lorente, the founder of DNA-ProKids, described the initiative as an international program that identified missing children, provided support for their relatives, and fought human trafficking.

"In Guatemala and Mexico, for instance, the Pro-Kids initiate at the national level has analyzed more than 200 cases and has helped identify 93 missing children, now already returned to their families," Jose said.

Around 40,000-70,000 Indonesian children fall victim to the sex trafficking industry every year. Of that number, 30 percent are children aged between 14 and 17, according to the National Commission for Child Protection.

The biggest domestic destinations for human trafficking are the Riau Islands, Medan, Bali, and West Tenggara Province. Outside of Indonesia, some of the biggest are Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

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