

Children Fight Against Time

There are still children forced to work hard. They missed their chance to study and are paid little.

Indra walked fast past slippery puddles at Muara Angke port, Jakarta. He carried a barrel full of fish and ice in his arms.

In 2006, he started to work as a crew member on 'pelele' boat; a small fishing boat. At that time, he wasn't yet 15 years old but he was already a registered member of the boat crew. The boat can carry four to five passengers, including the captain. Indra wasn't the only child at that time; he had a friend working on a boat who was about 13 years old.

His boat is different than the regular boats. It is a moderate size at 17 meters long, and its maximum cargo capacity is 15 tonnes.

The boat carries fish from Sumatra to Jakarta. "My job is to carry fish barrels with ice, and to put the fish into crates and move them manually," he said.

His presence is illegal because as crew, he has a heavy job which children are not allowed to perform.. He carried dozens of kilos manually onto the boat.

The shipping industry, in fact, often uses underage workers, as well as the fishing industry.

Indra could get past the application of labour law No.13 of 2003 as there are special conditions to hire children, but he violates the provision on the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) which governs, among others, slavery, child prostitution and abuse of children in illegal activities.

Detik magazine's investigation reveals that child labour in the shipping industry is often overlooked because it is committed by small shipping companies.

A boat crew based in Muara Angke, Sahroni, said it is easy to become a crew member. Boat owners usually don't pay attention to age and only require swimming skills.

The salary is low, around Rp.500.000 per trip, and the journey takes 3 to 4 days. Children are often in this role.

"They work as porters while I usually work on the engines," he explained.

There are dozens of similar boats in Muara Angke. Child workers receive the same salary and workload as adults.

The use of children by fishing boat owners is to fill jobs that don't require specific skills, but they are usually required to learn how to drive the boat.

The National Commission for Child Protection (Komnas PA) found that the use of child workers in shipping is not limited to Jakarta-based cargo companies. Fishermen's children in Rote Island in East Nusa Tenggara are also being used as child workers.

Such abuse, however, is not as bad as in Muara Angke. Chairman of the Commission, Arist Merdeka Sirait, commented on data on fishermen's children working in cargo kitchens. Kitchen work is not heavy but children need time to study.

"We received this data from a pastor there. It is usually seasonal. When there are fewer fish, fishermen don't go to sea," he explained.

Confessions about the presence of child workers in the shipping industry indicate the existence of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL). However, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s data shows a decrease in the number of child workers in Indonesia in 2010. Their survey shows Indonesia had approximately 1.5 million child workers in 2010, while in 2009, there were 1.8 million child workers between 10 and 17 years old. This represents a 4.3% decrease.

In 2012, the Ministry of Manpower managed to enroll 10,750 child workers into school. The Ministry of Transportation confirmed that boat operators have strict requirements for their crews and they must have a safety certificate, so the recruitment of children would be difficult.

However, monitoring fish boats is a challenge. Pelele boats are small and the Ministry of Transportation considers them to fall under the supervision of The Ministry of Maritime and Fisheries (KKP). Pelele boats are fishing boats.

"KKP monitors these small boats. They come and go through the fishery port," he explained. KKP stated that the Ministry of Transportation should conduct a more intensive monitoring of labour standards on the boats. KKP focuses on monitoring the contents of the boats, i.e., fish. The Head of KKP's communication center, Indra Sakti, said crew documents have been checked but so far, no child crews have been found.

"There are multiple documents to check, and the Ministry of Transportation should also monitor this issue," he explained.

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