

Child 'substitute drivers'

Child drivers? "I don't know about that," said the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Linda Amalia. "At night, children should study or rest at home."

Child drivers? "I'm just hearing about it now," said the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Linda Amalia Sari, when asked about the large number of child drivers on the streets of Jakarta. They carry dozens of passengers on public buses without a license or ID, as they are still underage.

The Minister seemed surprised but, like other high ranking government officials, Linda promised to do something about it through coordination with local government and related ministries. In terms of child protection, she said, her ministry made an agreement with local governments that the latter is responsible for protecting children in their own region.

Linda regretted the presence of so many child drivers. "These children should go to school and study or rest at night – not work on busy and dangerous streets in Jakarta. Not only are they too young, but the job is very risky for both drivers and passengers."

"I hope these children are not given high risk jobs," she said, when we met her at the House of Representatives (DPR) building in Senayan.

Linda and her accompanying staff admitted that they have no data on the incidence of child drivers. According to Understanding Children's Works, a joined agency established by the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF and World Bank in 2007, children under 13 years old are not allowed to work, and children 13 to 15 years old are allowed to work, but only light work which will not harm their physical and mental development. All children up to 17 years old are not allowed to perform hazardous tasks at work, and driving is considered a hazardous and high risk type of work.

Contacted separately, Chairman of the National Commission for Child Protection (KPA), Seto Mulyadi, said child labour is a complicated issue that cannot be resolved instantly because the main cause is the economy. Seto asserted that letting children work as substitute drivers is a violation of their rights. Unfortunately stakeholders, especially police officers, often tolerate it for economic reasons.

"It is a violation of children's rights and of traffic regulation," he said when we contacted him.

Seto is of the opinion that the local transportation office (Dishub) and the police should take firm actions against it because driving is a very risky job for children, as well as their passengers. These firm actions can be a short-term solution for the child driver issue. In a longer run, the government should empower people through the economy.

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