

# Children-related Issues Not Taken Seriously

Friday, 20 November 2015 WIB, By: Marwati



Children-related issues are still not fully addressed by the government, especially in the fulfillment of the fundamental rights of children. Despite the efforts government made to fulfill children's right, there are still some policies that are not children-friendly. The current policies can not guarantee the safety and the children's right to develop well.

Public Policy Observer, Prof. Muhadjir Darwin, said that children-related issues are not yet crucial so that it tends to be ignored. It is hardly on the politics and government's agenda. "The government still thinks that children's issues are not attractive, not sexy, so become a secondary issue," said Professor of Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Universitas Gadjah Mada when contacted on Thursday (19/11) at UGM.

Children issue is a very crucial issue and has to be dealt with as soon as possible because children are nation's asset and the future leaders of Indonesia.

"This is actually a very sexy issue because children are the nation's future," he explained.

According to Prof. Muhajir, Indonesian's policy has not been on children's favor. For example, the rejection by the Constitutional Court of review request on the Marriage Act Number 1 Year 1974, article 7 paragraph 1 about the marriage age limit. Following the review rejection, it means that underage marriage in Indonesia is legal, opposing the International policy.

"Government has not yet paid attention to underage marriage issue and it was not considered as a

big issue," He explained.

While international conventions set the age limit of marriage is 18 years, in Indonesia marriages can be performed when the girls reach the age of 16 years and men 18 years. The law gives leeway for girls under 16 years of age can marry with the permission and the dispensation of the trial judge.

"The judge is given flexibility to decide, meaning that the country cannot do anything to prevent child marriage," he added.

Further explained by Muhadjir, the government cannot give protection of children from various forms of violence, both physical and sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Meanwhile, cases of child abuse in recent years have increased.

Data provided by Child Protection Committee in 2013 noted that there were 3,023 complaints of child abuse. That number has increased by 60 percent over the previous year which was only 1,383 cases. Some 58 percent of them are sexual offense against children.

Meanwhile children's observer from Faculty of Psychology, Dr. Maria Goretti Adiyanti, said that there is an increasing government attention to the fulfillment of children's rights, particularly in education and health. It is seen with a variety of child-friendly policies.

She cited the government issued a policy on the prohibition of applying "calistung" test (reading, writing and counting) when entering elementary school and the application of the test among kindergarten. However, until now there are still schools that apply its capability as a requirement for admissions.

Although there has been concern from the government, said Adiyanti, there is still plenty of homework on child related issues that must be addressed, such as the protection of children from various forms of violence whether physical, verbal, or sexual. The fulfillment of the right of protection should be a major concern following increasing cases of violence against children in recent times.

"To reduce the number of child abuse needs to involve various stakeholders such as family members, teachers, and communities," she said.

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