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Speakers seen at the dissemination workshop on explanatory note of domestic adoption yesterday in Phnom Penh's Sunway Hotel. © Pha Lina

Government lays out adoption process

Thu, 14 September 2017 Yon Sineat and Erin Handley

Cambodia is aiming to bolster domestic adoptions, despite a severe lack of social workers needed to ensure the safety of children in care, following the launch of an "explanatory note" on the practice on Tuesday.

At a workshop that continued yesterday, Justice Ministry Secretary of State Chan Sotheavy said the note, which lays out the law and procedures around adoptions, will "make it easier" for judges, lawyers and social workers "when they enforce the law".

Speaking at the workshop, Unicef deputy representative Natascha Paddison said "domestic adoption is currently rarely used in an appropriate way in Cambodia".

"There are still not enough professional social workers to monitor the alternative care sector, to support families, to support children and to provide the courts with quality and timely advice on the situation of children who may be placed for adoption," Paddison said.

"In too many countries, children are fostered or adopted into families that turn out to be abusive or unable to adequately care for the children."

While trying to increase domestic adoption, the government is also aiming to reduce the number of children in orphanages by an ambitious 30 percent by 2018.

The explanatory note follows research by gender studies academic Kasumi Nakagawa, who found that of 7,500 Cambodians surveyed, fewer than one in five thought a couple should adopt if they could not have a child naturally.

Thirty percent said the couple "cannot do anything", while just over half said the couple should see a doctor and get treatment.

"Adoption is a last resort and many presented negative opinions about adoption," Nakagawa said, saying the stigma of an "unwanted child" could create family tension.

Unicef spokesman Iman Morooka, however, maintained that "the issue is not that domestic adoption is proving unpopular but that there was a lack of clarity about the law on domestic adoption", which the explanatory note sought to address.

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