

 ULU REJANG: The Government is concerned that the establishment of oil palm plantations in what were once logging territories in interior Sarawak could see foreign workers dumping their local wives and children when they return home.

This is a going to be a big problem that we foresee because based on current statistics, there are many plantations in Sarawak that have already employed thousands of foreign workers who are single men.

Out of every 1,000 workers in the plantations now, only 30 are native Sarawakians. The rest are from Indonesia and other countries, said Deputy Home Minister Jelaing Mersat.

If these foreign workers are here for a few years, there is a great possibility they will marry native girls.

We will then have a major dilemma because babies from such a union will have difficulty getting citizenship in our country.

He said there would then be thousands of babies and children in rural Sarawak who could be stateless and whose parents are separated.

They will grow up without birth certificates and MyKads and there will be no way we can trace their fathers, Mersat said when interviewed during his visit to interior Kapit last week.

Also with him were Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia, Ulu Rejang MP Datuk Billy Abit Joo and a delegation of 16 MPs from the Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club who visited interior central Sarawak last Tuesday to Friday.

Mersat visited a National Registration Department mobile team which had gone to seven settlements to register stateless Penans and other natives.

The deputy minister urged local community leaders and state assemblymen and MPs to go to the ground to warn the natives folks against getting into relationships with foreign workers.

They are here to work on a temporary basis only and they must then leave the country.

Getting married to them and having children with them will create life-long dilemmas that even the Government will find hard to resolve, he said.

He urged plantation companies who hired foreign workers to warn them of the same.

According to statistics gathered by The Star, there are at least 80,000 foreign workers employed in oil palm plantations in Sarawak.

Some of these plantations measure up to 50,000 hectares each and employed up to 3,000 workers at any one time.

These workers are free to move around the plantation, visit native longhouses and settlements and even go to rural villages and towns during their days off.