Crisis centre soon to prevent babies being dumped

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KOTA KINABALU: The State Government through the Ministry of Community Development and Consumer Affairs is in the midst of building the proposed Women Protection Home or Rumah Perlindungan Wanita (Rupawan) here to overcome the baby dumping problem.

Its Minister, Datuk Hjh Azizah Mohd Dun, said Saturday, it is a State-funded project and the home is scheduled to be completed by July.

However, its exact location is undisclosed for security reasons and in the interest of victims’ protection.

"Once the home is ready, it will be open to target groups throughout Sabah. We will take in women and girls aged 18 and above who face family problems and provide shelter to those in pregnancy crisis who do not get support or sympathy from their families.

"If it so happens, there is a place for them to go for refuge and rectify the damage done so that they can start anew. That is important," she said, after officiating at the Seminar on Growing Love, Million Hopes-Developing Happy Families at the Tun Ahmad Raffae Auditorium, Menara Tun Mustapha, here.

The one-day seminar was organised by the Sabah Women’s Advisory Council (MPWS) Education Committee with the cooperation of UiTM Sabah Branch and Yayasan Sabah.

Azizah, who is Klias Assemblywoman, made it clear that shelter at the Women Protection Home is temporary during which the residents will undergo counselling sessions while their problems are resolved.

The Ministry would be appointing trained counsellors from the State Public Welfare Services Department to serve at the Home.

See Page 2, Col. 6

Need for another centre

From Page One

"If necessary, we may also outsource for counsellors from the private sector."

Asked about the need to have this women protection home in addition to the Women Crisis Centre (now occupying the former Princess Ann Children’s Home in Likas), Azizah said:

"That one (Women Crisis Centre) is for a different purpose. We cannot mix the women from different target groups together." The Minister said the question of the women protection home “encouraging” promiscuous behaviour among young people does not arise.

"We will not stop here. At the same time, we are working with NGOs, institutions of higher learning and the community at large to instil high moral values in the young so that they will refrain from getting involved in undesirable activities which they will regret one day."

To another question that “red tape” might deter distressed girls from seeking refuge at the home, Azizah said:

"No red tape, there is no such thing. There will be no red tape."

In the meantime, she said, women and girls in crisis can seek the necessary assistance from the one-stop service centre for clients within the jurisdiction of the Sabah Women’s Affairs Department (Jhewa) and housed on the ground floor of Wisma Wanita, here.

"We will find ways and means to help them," she assured.

Having said this, the Minister is of the conviction that primary support for girls in crisis and their babies must come from the families concerned.

"What the Government is going to provide is meant to be just an additional facility."

For this reason, Azizah said emphasis was being given to programmes aimed at strengthening the family institution.