

Nigerian 'baby factory' raided, 32 teenage girls freed

Wed Jun 1, 10:32 am ET

LAGOS (AFP) – Nigerian police have raided a home allegedly being used to force teenage girls to have babies that were then offered for sale for trafficking or other purposes, authorities said on Wednesday.

"We stormed the premises of the Cross Foundation in Aba three days ago following a report that pregnant girls aged between 15 and 17 are being made to make babies for the proprietor," said Bala Hassan, police commissioner for Abia state in the country's southeast.

"We rescued 32 pregnant girls and arrested the proprietor who is undergoing interrogation over allegations that he normally sells the babies to people who may use them for rituals or other purposes."

Some of the girls told police they had been offered to sell their babies for between 25,000 and 30,000 naira (192 dollars) depending on the sex of the baby.

The babies would then be sold to buyers for anything from 300,000 naira to one million naira (1,920 and 6,400 dollars) each, according to a state agency fighting human trafficking in Nigeria, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

The girls were expected to be transferred to the regional NAPTIP offices in Enugu on Wednesday, the regional head Ijeoma Okoronkwo told AFP.

Hassan said the owner of the "illegal baby factory" is likely to face child abuse and human trafficking charges. Buying or selling of babies is illegal in Nigeria and can carry a 14-year jail term.

"We have so many cases going on in court right now," said Okoronkwo.

In 2008, police raids revealed an alleged network of such clinics, dubbed baby "farms" or "factories" in the local press.

Cases of child abuse and people trafficking are common in West Africa. Some children are bought from their families to for use as labour in plantations, mines, factories or as domestic help.

Others are sold into prostitution while a few are either killed or tortured in black magic rituals. NAPTIP says it has also seen a trend of illegal adoption.

"There is a problem of illicit adoption and people not knowing the right way to adopt children," said Okoronkwo.

Human trafficking is ranked the third most common crime after economic fraud and drug trafficking in the country, according to UNESCO.

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