



STREETWISE: Some mothers rent out their children to street beggars.

PICTURE: EYEWITNESS NEWS / CARTE BLANCHE

Kids sold as desperate moms need cash

**MANDY WIENER
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BABIES are being bought and sold illegally on the streets of Joburg for as little as R20 000.

A joint Eyewitness News/*Carte Blanche* investigation has revealed how desperate foreign women, mostly Zimbabweans, readily rent out their children for as little as R20 a day to beggars at congested intersections.

And doctors who have treated some of these babies believe the so-called "mothers" may be deliberately drugging and harming these children to

make them more compliant.

Charity worker Elsabe Coetzee, who runs a children's home in Kempton Park, first raised the alarm when she was approached by a woman who offered to sell her two children.

The mothers wanted to return to husbands in Zimbabwe, who weren't aware that they were pregnant. Coetzee offered to buy the infants to ensure their safety, but the sellers had a more lucrative offer.

She then contacted the two news groups, which began investigating after being put in touch with a woman known as "Meuke". With a journalist

posing as an infertile suburban housewife, a meeting with Meuke was set up.

Meuke offered them a five-month-old boy for R20 000. Then, to test the extent of the baby-selling racket, the team asked for a newborn girl.

Weeks later, Meuke put the team in touch with 19-year-old "Mary", in South Africa illegally and seven-and-a-half months pregnant. Mary was eager to sell her baby for R50 000, from which she would have to pay Meuke a commission.

At another meeting, the teenager said she was desperate for cash and the price was

negotiated down to R30 000.

Before the sale was finalised, the team told Mary they could not risk being arrested and put her in touch with Dikeledi Mashego, the assistant director in Joburg's displaced persons unit.

Mashego gave Mary her alternatives – including adoption and foster care. She phoned Mary twice after the meeting, but she didn't answer calls.

Carina du Toit, from the Centre for Child Law at the University of Pretoria, said selling a baby for adoption qualified as child trafficking.



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Zuma urges effective use of new Children's Act to benefit SA's youth

AMUKELANI MAPHOPHE

LAUNCHING the Children's Act in Atteridgeville township outside Pretoria on Friday, President Jacob Zuma said it would provide better mechanisms for reporting child abuse and neglect.

After 10 years of consultation, the legislation was adopted into law last month, giving emphasis to alleviating the plight of child-headed households.

While the act makes it a crime to traffic children, Zuma said it should be used along with the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill, which was established to prevent human trafficking and to address the shortcomings of current legislation pertaining to that crime.

Zuma urged everyone to use

the law effectively for the benefit and protection of children. With the Soccer World Cup increasing the likelihood of child trafficking, Zuma assured the nation that SA now had "competent human trafficking investigators in every organised crime unit".

The police, the United Nations Children's Fund, justice officials and social workers are also preparing to help during the World Cup, in all host cities. "Regular training workshops are presented to the police, especially to front-line officers working at ports of entry," he said.

Zuma warned that children would be more vulnerable due to the extended school holidays during the World Cup. He cited reports that show that worldwide, minor children constitute 50% of

all human trafficking victims, with 80% being women and girls.

The launch of the Children's Act was linked to the launch of Child Protection Week — which runs from today until May 30.

To ensure more children take part in soccer in future, the local organising committee intends to build football turfs in all 52 of SA's football association regions.

Zuma also highlighted the benefits for children of the infrastructure put in place for the World Cup. Future generations would benefit from it as much as would the tournament itself.

For the event to leave a "long-lasting and positive legacy", Zuma said everyone would need to work together to prevent human trafficking. He warned that young boys were also at risk.