

Indonesian women lobby for polygamy ban

By Radio Australia's Christine Webster

Posted Wed Apr 23, 2008 11:50am AEST

A coalition of Indonesian women's groups is calling on the Government to change the nation's marriage laws and abolish polygamy.

Under Indonesia's marital laws, a Muslim man can have more than one wife if permission is granted by a local court and the wife gives her consent.

The religious adviser for the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Imam Amin Hady, believes the marriage laws which permit polygamy cannot be abolished as they form part of the Koran.

But he has told Radio Australia's Connect Asia program that Indonesia's religious affairs and justice departments work together to ensure people do not abuse their polygamy rights.

"The scholars in Islam say, the general ruling is that man can only marry then one woman," he said.

"There is an exception where a man can marry more than one woman, with certain conditions, one, two, three, four, and this ruling can be very strict."

Permission for having more than one wife is only granted if the man's first wife cannot fulfil her obligations, is disabled, ill, or cannot have children.

But Indonesia's Rahima Centre for Education and Information on Women's Rights says many men are providing false information in order to gain permission.

Herb Feith Research professor from Monash University, Dr Greg Barton, says it is understandable women are concerned some men in Indonesia are abusing their right to have a second wife.

"I think most people who look at these things would say it's scarcely ever a good thing, it's generally a bad thing and it's best if it's discouraged," he said.

"The question of policy comes back to how best you change practices, so certainly revising laws has got to be part of it, but you've got to change attitudes."

Civil servants in Indonesia are not allowed to practice polygamy and when the Indonesian Government in



Indonesian women are calling on the Government to abolish polygamy. (File photo) (Reuters)