



CONCERNED: Edna Molewa

'Aids orphan tourism' worry

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THE growing numbers of wealthy tourists who jet in to South Africa for "Aids orphan tourism" might be damaging the emotional well-being of young children.

Social Development Minister Edna Molewa said in a written reply to a Parliamentary question on Friday that her department would start researching the new phenomenon to make sure that children were not at risk.

She admitted that she did not know if "tourist volunteers" were screened and trained about the possible emotional effect of their contact with children, as many long-term South African volunteers are.

Two months ago, Linda Richter, executive director of the Human Sciences Research Council research programme on Child, Youth, Family and Social Development, warned that volunteer caregivers who fly in and form bonds with

young orphans for a short time before flying out again, would be "especially damaging to young children".

Richter described "Aids orphan tourism" as tourists from the Northern hemisphere arriving for short stints at orphanages.

"There is a real danger of 'voluntourists' crowding out local workers, especially when people are prepared to pay for the privilege to volunteer," wrote Richter.

Richter said orphans

were best off with their families, and that donor funds should be spent on supporting those families.

But Molewa said her department had always promoted the idea of volunteers.

"If there are any challenges within this practice, this matter must be thoroughly investigated," she said.

Molewa added that orphanages did not only cater for kids whose parents had died of HIV-related illnesses but for all orphans.

