

31/07/1997

Alijah needs helping hand

Sam Cheong

TIME is ticking away for Dr Alijah Gordon. Every second counts as she fights to secure funds and full-time workers to run her programme - the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI) - for orphaned Palestinian children.

"I'm 68 now and may not live long enough to carry on working up to 18 hours daily. I have only one full-time staff and he's leaving," she says.

"It's hard to find people willing to do voluntary social service these days. I could surely use a helping hand."

Confined to her bedroom with a fractured spine, the feisty humanitarian operates from her office located in a rented bungalow at Jalan Delima in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur.

Gordon, a trustee for the MSRI, gets no fixed wages or any form of social benefits. She depends solely on charity and goodwill.

"I get coffee, which is the most important thing in my life, and food from sponsors. Some may have the impression of me leading a glamorous life as a humanitarian, but I guess the real situation is far from being comfortable," she says grinning.

MSRI's full-time employee and Gordon's confidante, Phillip, as he prefers to be called, will bid farewell to the organisation after more than 10 years' service.

"It will be difficult to find a replacement. I placed advertisements in the newspapers but the results were very, very disappointing," says Gordon.

"Could you believe it, I have had interviewees asking for RM3,000 and above! I can't compete with commercial rates because MSRI is a non-profit outfit. Is this the end of the spirit of volunteerism?" ponders Gordon.

Apart from the nagging problem of quality human resources, the MSRI administration centre is also plagued by a tenancy agreement which expires at the end of the year.

The Selangor State Government has given the institute 0.9ha for its new centre.

"We need more than RM6 million to develop this land without hurting its surroundings. The MSRI has only RM3 million in its fund donated by KLSE members and corporate foundations."

Gordon says she hopes to raise RM1 million at a charity dinner to be held at the Putra World Trade Centre on Aug 8. It will be attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and about 50 Palestinian children sponsored by individuals here.

Eighty Palestinians including children and social workers will be flown in next month on a goodwill visit. The month-long stay, hosted by the Ministry of National Unity and Community Development, will also cover trips to the country's northern states and East Malaysia.

Gordon urges private and corporate citizens to help the MSRI cause. Proceeds from the charity event will also be channelled to the organisation's centre for traumatised Palestinian children in Beirut.

"Palestinian children in Lebanon live in destitute, their fathers killed and their mothers walking the streets to make ends meet. This is the situation today and I wish to share this with everyone so that they will be able to feel the Palestinians' sorrow," says Gordon.

If you're interested in being a sponsor or in volunteering your services as full-time staff at the MSRI, please contact Gordon at 03-2430032,

2417603 or fax 03-2533382.

(END)