

10/05/2000

## DPM launches fund in aid of Champa Muslims

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - A fund to help Champa Muslims in Cambodia, who have endured prolonged sufferings due to war, was launched by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today.

The Cambodian Humanitarian Fund (Tabung Ehsan Kemboja) is jointly organised by the Malaysian Humanitarian Movement (Gerakan Ehsan Malaysia), Berita Harian and New Straits Times.

The Champas are in need of drinking water, food, medicine, building materials and equipment for well-digging.

Abdullah said it was the responsibility of Malaysians, in some measure, to help the destitute people in neighbouring countries.

He said giving assistance was not the Government's responsibility alone but also of individuals, businesses and non-governmental organisations.

"When helping destitute people, we should not take into account ideological differences, political leanings, party associations, religion or race. We must help, whether our contribution is in cash or kind," he added.

Abdullah's speech was read by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Leo Michael Toyad who represented him at the launch.

Present were the fund's chairman, Dr Norraesah Mohamad, New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd editorial adviser Datuk Mazlan Nordin, New Straits Times group editor Ahmad A. Talib and Berita Harian group editor Ahmad Rejal Arbee.

Abdullah said the sufferings of the Champa Malays were close to the hearts of Malaysians.

Their sufferings had been prolonged due to ideological differences and war.

"From being a big community, there are now only 400,000 Champa Malays," he said, adding that being a minority made it difficult for them to overcome poverty, which in turn hampered their progress.

Noraessah said the Champas were facing great hardships as they were deprived of clean water, food, medicine and building materials for houses.

"Here, we have agencies to assist the poor. The Champas do not have such assistance."

Noraessah said Gerakan Ehsan Malaysia also planned to set up a mobile clinic for the Champas.

She told a Press conference later that Gerakan Ehsan Malaysia also planned to adopt a Champa village.

She said the fund received RM50,000 from several companies and individuals today.

Toyad said while the Government did not provide direct aid to the Champas, it encouraged investments in the area that would translate into jobs and higher standard of living.

"This is line with the 'prosper thy neighbour' policy advocated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he added.

Donations can be sent to Gerakan Ehsan Malaysia, c/o Corporate Communications and Promotions, NSTP, Balai Berita, 31, Jalan Riong, 59100 Kuala Lumpur (tel: 03-2823131 ext 592/575 or fax: 03-2840386).

Cheques should be made out to The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad with the words "Tabung Ehsan Malaysia" written on the reverse side.

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