

Headline **Stop this tar brushing of the do-gooders**
Date **09 Aug 2011**
MediaTitle **The Star**
Section **Nation**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **304,904 / 1,026,812**

Language **English**
Page No **38**
Article Size **260 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **9,730**
PRValue **29,190**



Stop this tar brushing of the do-gooders

LAST week's raid of the Harapan Komuniti event held at the Damansara Utama Methodist Centre by the Selangor Religious Department (JAIS) has served to highlight a gap in the welfare system.

Despite efforts by the state and Federal governments as well as numerous bodies, people in need are still being left out of social assistance programmes. It is not for lack of trying that this is happening, but it underlines the need to improve upon these programmes.

There are many in the Muslim community who are being left out or denied help and assistance by their own brethren and religious welfare systems.

For reasons which range from the moral and undesirable (e.g being transgender persons, sex workers, living with HIV and AIDS) to the bureaucratic (insufficient or incomplete paperwork, no address of residence, non-national), many members of the community, especially the poor and homeless, are left with palms outstretched to access services which ironically were established to help and serve them.

Each year, millions of ringgit in *zakat* are collected from Muslims in Malaysia. In 2007, RM806mil was collected.

Data from the Centre for Zakat Collection also clearly indicate an appreciation in alms on average of about 20% each year. That is a lot of money.

Very often, these systems expect people to go to them rather than seeking out and identifying possible beneficiaries.

This could involve the needy travelling to a town or a city far from where they live, using money and other costs which they could ill afford to spend, only to find out that this is the wrong office, or that they have insufficient documents to qualify for the aid or arriving after office hours.

There have also been incidences of selective charity and of aid being tied to political figures, where the provision of aid is dependent on when it is convenient rather than when it is needed.

Thus many from the community have felt the need to access services from other sources, and in this case, those which are faith based.

Small wonder then many of the poor, homeless and marginalised access whatever service is within reach and which bothers to do the outreach to the communities regardless of faith.

I am disturbed and disappointed by the reports which have systematically sought to cast the humanitarian work of the non-Muslim religious community in an insidious light which does the latter much dishonour and disservice.

The insinuation of conversion behind the motive of helping those not of similar faiths has gone on long enough and must stop.

These reports have demonstrated a clear "*katak di bawah tempurung*" attitude, and ignorance of how non-Muslim charity systems operate, and how they play a critical and valuable role in plugging gaps in our social protection net.

A large number of Buddhist and Christian charity services such as

soup kitchens, shelter homes, drop in centres, hospices, skills training, and to a certain extent limited financial assistance, are available to all regardless of faith and ethnicity.

These services, which are volunteer driven, often reach out to poor communities and actively seek out those who are most in need of assistance.

They are designed to be as accessible and open as possible and do not require that you first become a convert. Most importantly, they also respect the principle that there should be no compulsion in religion.

I once served at a soup kitchen organised by a Christian based welfare organisation.

Those who have made accusations of proselytisation and have caused ill feeling and distrust towards the Malaysian Christian community should be made to produce the evidence to back their assertions and be accountable.

We have all seen how Malaysians are able to extend help to each other in their time of need regardless of religion and ethnicity, as it should be. It should not be wrong for non-Muslims to assist those who are Muslim and vice versa.

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Kuala Lumpur.**

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