

MALAYSIAN FIRMS HELP EBOLA-HIT W.AFRICAN NATIONS

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Container loads of medical gloves being unloaded at Liberia's Port of Monrovia

KUALA LUMPUR: The 20.9 million medical gloves pledged by 12 glovemaking and major plantation companies in Malaysia, continues to be despatched in batches to Ebola- stricken nations in West Africa, as the spread slows down.

Ebola is a deadly viral illness, first identified in 1976, which re-emerged a year ago in Guinea and spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone.

“Thousands of people in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are losing loved ones to Ebola. We are taking this pandemic seriously,” said Malaysia Rubber Gloves Manufacturing Association president Lim Kwee Shyan.

“Much of the unfortunate deaths and suffering from Ebola is being avoided or at least mitigated with disposable gloves. We will continue to speed up the shipment for the balance medical gloves to be delivered to

the affected African nations,” he told Business Times in a telephone interview yesterday.

The Ebola virus is spread through contact with bodily fluids. It starts with vague feverish symptoms, worsening until the patient begins bleeding from eyes, nose and mouth.

Among Malaysian glove companies extending a helping hand are Tekmedic Sdn Bhd, Top Glove Corp Bhd, Latexx Partners Bhd, Brightway Sdn Bhd, Careplus Bhd, Hartalega Holdings Bhd, Kossan Rubber Industries Bhd, Koon Seng Sdn Bhd, YTY Group, Adventa Bhd, WRP and Qube.

The glove companies source natural rubber from four plantation giants, namely IOI Corp Bhd, Sime Darby Bhd, Felda Global Ventures Holdings Bhd and Kuala Lumpur Kepong Bhd (KLK).

Last week, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf lifted the state of emergency imposed to control an Ebola outbreak that has ravaged the country. She reportedly said the move did not mean “the fight is over”, although numbers of new infections were no longer increasing.

Sirleaf said night curfews would be reduced and weekly markets could resume across Liberia. Preparations are also made for the re-opening of schools.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed the death toll from the virus is now 5,177 people, almost all of them from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

“We’ve donated 5.7 million rubber gloves worth US\$155,000 (RM502,200) as part of our commitment to help Liberia fight the Ebola virus disease. The gloves shipment, packed in three containers, arrived at the Port of Monrovia on October 31,” said a Sime Darby spokesperson.

On-going quarantine and disease prevention awareness programmes are also being carried out with Sime Darby's workforce of almost 3,000 there.

KLK, which also operates in Liberia via its unit, Equatorial Palm Oil plc (EPO), has handed over their donation of US\$110,000 (RM356,400) worth of medical gloves through the initiative of the Malaysian government to the countries infected by this deadly disease. EPO had also directly contributed US\$15,000 worth of materials in the form of buckets, chlorine, clorox, isolation gowns, thermo flash and PPE (surgical gloves, mouth covers and shields) to be distributed to healthcare workers, patients and the communities.

A KLK spokesperson said, "We are implementing precautionary measures at all our operating sites in accordance with the government guidelines. Even though there have been no instances of the Ebola on or around our operations at Palm Bay and Butaw estates, we will continue our efforts as we believe that with the right understanding, precaution and processes in place, this Ebola virus will be avoidable and containable."