

MALAYSIAN TYCOONS HELP SYRIAN REFUGEES

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*Victims of war: Tan (second from right) and Lim giving out schoolbags to Syrian children at the El Menahil International School in Istanbul. —
Bernama*

ISTANBUL: Two top Malaysian corporate leaders are reaching out to refugees from war-torn Syria who have made Turkey their home for the past six years.

Berjaya Group founder Tan Sri Vincent Tan and Top Glove Corporation Bhd founder Tan Sri Lim Wee Chai are here on a special three-day mission with 25 volunteers to distribute aid to the refugees.

There are four million Syrian refugees in Turkey with 700,000 in Istanbul alone. Both Tan and Lim are accredited volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation, a Taiwan-based humanitarian relief organisation.

In Malaysia, Tzu Chi has 1.2 million members who contribute a minimum of RM5 monthly, with some 20,000 volunteers. Its operations in Turkey

are managed by three Taiwanese, including Faisal Hu and his wife Nadia Chou, who are both Muslim converts.

They are being assisted by more than 300 Syrian-born volunteers. The Malaysian volunteers spent Friday at a clinic and later a school for refugee children in downtown Sultan Gazi district.

At a briefing for the visiting Malaysian team at the clinic, Faisal said the well-equipped centre had treated about 270,000 patients since it opened in July 2016, averaging between 9,000 and 12,000 people monthly.

With 13 doctors, it provides services such as family medicine, internal medicine, paediatrics, gynaecology, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, dentistry and total medical treatment.

Later, at the El Menahil International School, the Malaysians were warmly welcomed by teachers and about 2,000 students who were streamed into elementary, primary and secondary classes.

Faisal, who has lived in Turkey for 23 years, said the school started with over 500 students and its education model was later adopted by the Turkish Ministry of Education and UNICEF for other schools, benefiting 350,000 children of Syrian refugees in other parts of the country.

Tan presented various forms of donations to the school, while Lim handed over boxes of rubber gloves for the clinic.

Top Glove Corporation, of which Lim is chairman, is the world's largest manufacturer of rubber gloves.

The six-year-old elementary children performed dances for the visitors and shouted: "Shukran Malaysia" (Thank You, Malaysia).

A visibly-moved Tan told the students, teachers and volunteers: "I'm very proud of you all for what you are doing and I admire you all."

The poignant moments in the sessions with the Malaysian delegation came when some refugees spoke of their hopes for their homeland.

Najwa Muhammad Khalf, a 16-year-old girl who lost her legs in a bombing in the ravaged city of Aleppo, said all the other 11 members of her family were killed.

She was rescued by relatives and crossed the border to Turkey some 1,200km away.

She has since been fitted with a prosthesis.

When asked what message she had for the warring factions in Syria, she spontaneously said: "Stop the war."

Ahmed Jned, 21, said all Syrian refugees were longing to return home while Taleb Aljadaan, 44, a teacher at the school, who fled to Turkey five years ago, said all that he and fellow refugees wanted was for a settlement to the Syrian conflict. — *Bernama*