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Hope for trafficked student victims

TAR UC's policy of helping less privileged extends to foreigners cheated of an education

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tunku Abdul Rahman University College's (TAR UC) mission has always been open to helping the less privileged receive higher education and that is what it hopes to do now for student trafficking victims.

TAR UC president Datuk Dr Tan Chik Heok said it would "gladly open its doors" to foreign students who were cheated and trafficked to Malaysia.

"If the students meet the minimum requirements and they genuinely want to study, we will enrol them," he said.

He was responding to the R.AGE's Student/Trafficked exposé which uncovered a network of agents and private colleges that trafficked foreign students to Malaysia by abusing the student visa system.

Many victims, mostly from Bangladesh, are forced to work illegally to repay the fees of the agents and colleges, and most of these colleges do not even offer classes.

"This is something truly despicable. These young men and women came here because of Malaysia's reputation as a welcoming nation with good higher learning institutions but the agents are using that to ruin their lives."

Both Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh and Immigration Department director-general Datuk Seri Mustafar Ali have already pledged to support R.AGE's campaign to end student trafficking and force the colleges involved to pay for the victims' fees at another college.

Hailing the minister's move, Dr Tan said TAR UC would take in 100 trafficked students across its campuses in Kuala Lumpur, Perak, Johor, Penang, Pahang and Sabah.

"Our fees are already heavily subsidised to help local students but if the ministry needs us to reduce it for trafficked victims, we will do it," said Dr Tan.

He also offered to help these victims get part-time work during semester breaks.

Khadijah Shamsul, programme director of Bangladeshi migrants' rights NGO Migrant88, said she hoped Malaysia would develop more student-centric regulations and policies.

"We should give them the same rights as local students.

"The authorities should also open their doors and provide services to help them, rather than victimising them and blaming them for falling into the trap," she said.

Bar Council Migrants, Refugees and Immigration Affairs Committee chairman Datuk Seri M. Ramachelvam called for stern action to be taken against complicit colleges.

"The ministry should blacklist and deregister these institutions as well as their promoters so that they don't set up another college," he said.

R.AGE also launched a campaign calling for student trafficking victims to report their cases at rage.com.my/trafficked, which will connect them to Tenaganita, Migrant88 or the ministry for a second chance at education.

Go to rage.com.my/trafficked to find out more about the Student/Trafficked campaign.