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CSOs play important role during COVID-19 recovery period – Tengku Zafrul

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 17 – The government sees that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are playing an important role during the COVID-19 recovery period, particularly through the implementation of Budget 2022 measures, to help empower the local communities that they serve.

Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz said to this end, the government's partnership with CSOs is highly crucial, particularly in ensuring that everyone is cared for and gets the support they need.

"CSOs and social enterprises are crucial stakeholders in our nation's road to healing. This is because they are often better able to access pockets of society more efficiently and therefore, better able to customise the appropriate interventions.

"In short, civil society are key development partners for the government," he said in his opening address at the virtual Hasanah Forum 2021 today.

Often called the "third sector", Tengku Zafrul said civil society's role has become even more pronounced since the

beginning of the pandemic.

Last year, during the peak of the pandemic, he said the government created the Hasanah Special Grant (HSG) as part of the PRIHATIN package, with the aim of supporting projects that improve the quality of life and socio-economic resilience of the B40 communities, including children, refugees, Orang Asli, the ageing community, and the homeless.

"This was done by partnering with CSOs in the areas of education, supporting livelihoods and providing direct food aid, specifically during the movement control order (MCO).

"Through this collaboration, to date the HSG has allocated RM50 million over two phases. A total of 110 projects were successfully implemented in the first phase, and some of these projects have been earmarked for scaling up which will ensure more sustained benefit to the communities," he said.

As at August 2021, Tengku Zafrul said the 110 projects have covered 140,000 beneficiaries, largely from vulnerable communities, and about 400 endangered animals for their care and upkeep.

As such, he said the government is looking forward to continuing and further strengthening its partnership with CSOs to leverage their expertise and reach.

In recognition of the CSOs crucial role, for next year he said RM100 million would be provided in the form of a matching grant with government-linked company (GLC)-owned foundations to work on key areas that the government has specified in Budget 2022 such as strengthening mental health and social support services, after-school education, income generation for vulnerable groups and preserving cultural and artistic heritage.

In an effort to nurture a thriving and sustainable fundraising ecosystem for social enterprises, he said Budget 2022 also provides incentives in the form of tax exemptions on all social enterprise income for up to three years of assessment, subject to validation of the Social Enterprise Accreditation from the stipulated authority.

He said this would support social enterprises to be financially sustainable in their mission to create positive social or environmental impact.

"Thirdly, we are collaborating with Yayasan Keluarga Malaysia to provide and protect the welfare, education and future of children who have been orphaned due to COVID-19.

"This list is, of course, not exhaustive, and other areas of potential collaboration also include social work, livelihood programmes and social accountability," he added.

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