Penang is home sweet ‘Honey Pot’ for vagrants

PENANG has been described as a ‘Honey Pot’ for the homeless and vagabonds to get their basic needs.

Penang Welfare Services Department (JKM) director Zulkifli Ismail said non-governmental organisations (NGOs) often contributed food and provided shelters to them.

“It is the NGOs’ right to give out food to the homeless and vagabonds but the food must be healthy and clean.

“JKM’s role is to provide assistance and aid to prevent the homeless and vagrants from being involved in unhealthy activities,” he said in a press conference after a joint-operation conducted in George Town.

The operation which started at 1am on Wednesday was conducted in Komtar, Prangin Mall, Penang Road, Chulia Street, Chowrasta Market, Jalan Datuk Keramat, Perak Road, Weld Quay, Esplanade, Jalan Mesjid Kapitan Keling, King Street and Queen Street.

Some 60 members from JKM, the Penang Immigration Department, police, Rela, the Penang Islamic Religious Affairs Department, Penang Municipal Council, the National Registration Department and the National Anti-Drug Agency took part in the operation.

Also joining the team were three Universiti Sains Malaysia mass communication final year students.

A total of 61 vagabonds including six United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees refugees and three foreigners were roped in during the operation.

JKM unit head (senior citizens and family) Norashikin Idris said the foreigners and refugees were referred to the Penang Immigration Department while 33 vagabonds were handed over to the state Welfare Department.

“One person was sent to the hospital for mental check-up and the remaining were let off with a warning and advice,” she said.

Zulkifli said the department usually worked with the relevant government agencies when conducting operations.

“Besides conducting night operations, we also do morning visits to identify the beggars and save them. At night, we carry out operations on vagabonds and the homeless.

“Due to our exercise, the statistics of the homeless and vagrants has dropped from year to year,” he said, adding there were 360 cases recorded last year compared to 418 in 2010 and 445 in 2009.

“Cases of the homeless and vagrants being placed in welfare institutions had also dropped from 125 cases in 2009 and 104 in 2010 to 95 last year,” he said.