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AIDS-Ramos

DRAWING STRATEGIES FOR AIDS PREVENTION

By: Nur'ul Afida Kamaludin

MANILA, Oct 25 (Bernama) -- About 2,500 delegates from Asia and the Pacific gathered at the Philippines International Convention Centre (PICC) here today to draw up strategies to check the spread of Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in the densely populated Asia-Pacific region.

The 4th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific themed "Partnership Across Borders Against HIV/AIDS" was organised by the the AIDS Society of the Philippines (ASP) and sponsored by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

Among the countries participating are Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, India, Nepal, Australia, China, England, Netherland, Brunei, Philippines and Singapore.

President Fidel Ramos in his keynote address at the opening of the congress urged the international community especially those in the Asia-Pacific region to immediately recognise the imminent danger from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and AIDS challenges.

"The challenge is upon us now. The decision is in our hands," he said, adding that the collective actions taken by the congress during the five-day conference would determine whether Asia and the Pacific will merely sidestep the issue.

"We must act together now. The price of apathy and inactivity - in lives lost, economic opportunities foregone, and setback in human development - is too high to be ignored", he said.

Ramos said the Philippines has been unstinting its support to find a cure for AIDS and in September last year, he signed a proclamation to declared 1997 as the national AIDS prevention year to highlight his government's commitment in the campaign against HIV and AIDS.

He was the first head of state of government to issue such declaration of support.

Ramos said the the number of infected people worldwide increase at the rate of some 8,500 a day and no country had been spared of the global pandemic with 30 million people estimated to be HIV positive.

He also noted that the world's perception of the People With Aids (PWAs) had changed lately compared to before where AIDS was now viewed as a larger socio-economic and development problems.

"This change of viewpoint has been helpful in putting our fears and our responses into a more appropriate context by dealing with the problems in a holistic and comprehensive manner that involves all sectors of community," he said.

While stressing that isolation stance was not the cure to the disease, Ramos said closing borders would only increase the vulnerability of peoples and reduced their survivability.

Ramos said the only recourse for all nations was to share experiences and be united in an unwavering commitment to combat the deadly disease.

"In unity, we find the collective strength and the resources to fight this global scourge," he added.

Earlier, when declaring the opening of the congress, the president of ASP who is also the chairperson for the organising committee Dr Ofelia T. Monzon said the conference would focus on the theoretical cures and vaccines as well as preventive measures to combat the disease.

"The complexities of AIDS factors need to be looked at in the setting of problems specific to the Asia-Pacific region," she said.

The congress will discuss topics on Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS, Strategies on HIV/AIDS Prevention, HIV Disease Management, Sexuality in HIV/AIDS in the Asia-Pacific region and the Recent Advances in HIV Theraphy.

Health Ministry Parliament Secretary Datuk M. Mahalingam, Malaysia AIDS Council President Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir and Tenaganita President Irene Fernandez attended the opening ceremony.

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