

30/09/1997

Help combat AIDS menace, women told

Siti Rahmah Lehan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Health Ministry hopes to come up with a National Strategic Plan on women and AIDS in which women will be used as agents to help prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said today the Ministry would re-evaluate the current HIV and AIDS situation in the country and the effectiveness of its programmes.

Siti Zaharah said as of July 31, there were 22,245 people with HIV and 1,184 with AIDS and 740 of them were women.

Siti Zaharah said unfortunately some of those infected with HIV and AIDS were mothers who had been infected by their husbands.

She also said 43 per cent or 9,570 people with HIV and AIDS were aged below 19.

Siti Zaharah said this during the launch of the National Conference on Women and AIDS at the Renaissance Palm Garden Hotel in Putrajaya.

"The World Health Organisation has reported that teenagers are more susceptible to HIV. Half of all HIV cases in the world were youths between 15 and 24," she added.

She said the risk of women being infected with HIV or AIDS was two to four times higher compared to men and the number of women being infected was also increasing.

"We want parents to teach their children about HIV and AIDS so that they will not indulge in unhealthy activities such as drugs and prostitution," she said.

Siti Zaharah said the need to tackle the issue was never greater as more women were being infected or were being exposed to the virus.

Siti Zaharah urged women to unite to prevent the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS among women in this country.

"One of the objectives of this conference is inform women and mothers of the danger of HIV and AIDS."

Siti Zaharah hoped that participants would leave with more ideas on how to tackle the spread of the disease.

The two-day conference is a joint-effort between the Health Ministry's AIDS/STD section and the Malaysian AIDS Council.

Also present were Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, Women's Institute of Management chairman Datuk Napsiah Omar, the Health Ministry's Disease Control (AIDS/STD) deputy director Dr C. Prathapa Senan, United Nations Development Programme regional representative Neil Buhne and United Nations AIDS representative Mary Kakeeto.

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