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AIDS-Malaysia

MALAYSIA TO HOST 5TH ASIA AND THE PACIFIC CONGRESS ON AIDS IN 1999

MANILA, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will host the 5th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in 1999, aimed at finding strategies and forge stronger regional efforts in battling the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The announcement was made by the AIDS Society of the Philippines (ASP) at the closing of the 4th congress here today.

The five-day congress was attended by some 2,500 participants from some 20 countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, the United States, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar dan Cambodia.

A document which reflected the attitudes and commitments of the participants to the 4th congress, among others, acknowledged their realisation that all people could be affected by HIV/AIDS and they should not be subjected to discrimination and stigma.

The document, known as the Manila Manifesto, proclaimed that young people, women and the marginalised population were often forced into situations of significant risk through the persistence of social inequities and increase their vulnerability to HIV infection.

The manifesto also demanded that the health of the people living with HIV/AIDS (PWAs) to be improved through appropriate medical management and traditional medicine.

The manifesto was signed by the chairperson of the 4th congress' organising committee, Dr Ofelia T.Monzon, president of the AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific (ASAP) Dr Roy Chan, president of the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir, the director of the Department of Country Support of UNAIDS Dr Rob Moodie and the Coordinator of Asia Pacific Network for PWAs Paul Toh.

Dr Monzon later handed the manifesto to Marina as the chairperson of the 5th cgress.

Marina who is also the vice-president of ASAP, in response on behalf of Asia to the manifesto, said it gave challenges to Asia in tackling the epidemic, which had led to the disregard of human rights particularly to women, children and marginalised communities such as drug users, sex workers and migrant workers.

"This disregard has led to much suffering including vulnerability to many disease but most especially the HIV/AIDS," she said adding that AIDS had forged solidarity in finding solution to the epidemic.

Saying that AIDS had made the people working in the field of HIV/AIDS to understand the power of hope, Marina stressed that instead of despair and defeatism, they should unite in order to get the strength to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

Marina also pledged to uphold all the promises made in the manifesto besides "to coax, cajole, plead, urge and demand" that the resolutions be put into practice by all Asian governments, communities, private sectors and individuals.

Earlier, the Sex Workers Network; The Harm Reduction Network For Drug Users; and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community each made their statements which among others called on the organising committee of the World AIDS Conference 1998 and the steering committee of the 5th congress on AIDS 1999 to let them be involved in both and other conferences in the future.

They also demanded that the Asian government and communities recognise

and ensure their rights as human beings which they claimed were abused by some authorities. -- BERNAMA

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