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Aids

AIDS: WORST YET TO COME, SAYS WHO EXPERT

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, June 22 (Bernama) -- The worst is still yet to come in the worldwide battle against AIDS, a World Health Organisation (WHO) expert warned here today.

Executive director of UNAIDS at the Geneva-based WHO Dr Peter Piot said complacency was growing as new drugs and treatments were being discovered while some countries deny that they have the problem.

He told the Third International Aids Impact conference here that as long as the epidemic was not solved and under control everywhere, it is not under control in a single country.

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir is among the guest speakers at the three-day conference opened today by the Governor-General of Australia Sir William Deane.

Dr Piot, a Belgian microbiologist, who has worked in the HIV-AIDS field for more than a decade, said some 8,500 people including about 1,000 children were being infected with HIV virus daily worldwide.

He said there had been a dramatic increase in the number of people living with Aids in South, Southeast Asia and the Pacific region from three million in 1995 to five million last year.

About 23 million people lived with the virus worldwide and there were "explosive epidemics" taking off in India, Vietnam and China, he said.

"My message is, the worst has still to come on a worldwide scale," he said.

Dr Piot said new treatments to extend the lives of HIV sufferers were too costly for most sufferers in developing countries.

While there was a major breakthrough, resistance was developing against new drugs and there was a race to improve them.

Dr Piot said UNAIDS was promoting the use of female condoms which had been introduced in a number of African countries, both empowering women and providing another way to stop the virus' spread.

A vaccine against HIV infections was "dearly needed" but there was still a long way to go before this was realised, he added. -- BERNAMA

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