

22 OCT 1998

Hasmah-Poor

ECONOMIC CRISIS HAMPERS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS, SAYS SITI HASMAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- The widespread economic crisis as well as political instability in some regions are responsible for the failures of some development efforts in many countries, resulting in high levels of poverty, the prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, said today.

Following this, the cutbacks on essential areas of public expenditures, particularly social expenditures, would lead to the deterioration in the living standards of the weaker and vulnerable segments of society such as the women and children, she said.

"We, therefore need to take appropriate steps to face up to the menace of poverty. We need to develop the potentials of women, who represent half of the human resource of the world," she said at the opening the Third International Steering Committee (ISC) Meeting on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, here.

She is the ISC president. The meeting was opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Siti Hasmah said the steps involved developing skills, providing opportunities and making the work environment safer and conducive for women to participate actively in economic and social development.

Meanwhile, ISC patron Queen Fabiola, in her remarks, quoted some interesting points from the United Nations Development Programme's 1998 Human Development Report on how the developed world used its resources and the comparisons between the basic needs of the poor and the consumer spending of the rich:

- + An annual US\$6 billion is needed to provide basic education for all compared to an annual consumption expenditure of US\$8 billion for cosmetics in the United States alone;

- + An annual US\$9 billion is required for safe water and sanitation for all compared to an annual consumption of ice cream worth US\$11 billion in Europe alone;

- + An annual US\$13 billion would go to basic health and nutrition for all compared to an annual expenditure of US\$17 billion for pet food in Europe and the United States.

-- BERNAMA

RAZ JK