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Mahathir-Aids

MEDIA POWER CAN HELP PREVENT SPREAD OF AIDS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on the media to use its power to help prevent the spread of Aids or acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

In an emotional speech, he said the media's role towards that end could not be quantified particularly by the number of people it could educate on the danger of AIDS.

"We see these days the power of media and yet in the age of information, there is not enough information that is as important as prevention," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the presentation of the Red Ribbon Media Awards at the Dorsett Regency hotel at Jalan Imbi here today.

The ceremony, organised by the Malaysian Aids Foundation, was in conjunction with World Aids Day today.

Dr Mahathir said he was saddened that Aids has existed, and in most cases, spread throughout the world due to people's ignorance of the disease.

"It is distressful that we have to have this function at all, we have found a disease that does not exist before," he said.

Relating the early days he was studying medicine, Dr Mahathir said he was amazed by thousands of diseases that assailed the human population and he had thought that there would be no more new diseases.

"Today it was reported that about 16,000 people will get infected with HIV every day. The unfortunate thing is that Aids spread through ignorance,.. if people know about Aids..." Dr Mahathir paused as he tried to overcome his emotion.

Dr Mahathir said he was glad with the role played by the media in spreading knowledge about Aids to the people at large and hoped that the media would appreciate the Red Ribbon awards and use its power to do something charitable.

On the other hand, Dr Mahathir said, the multi-cultures of people had somehow or rather acted against Aids prevention.

"We see in certain cultures where women will not deny the rights of the husband, etc, and this has contributed to the spread of Aids," he said.

Dr Mahathir said a simple way of preventing the spread of Aids was through knowledge about the disease so that people could avoid getting it.

"We who know are quite able to avoid, but those who do not know are unable to do so," he added.

Earlier, Malaysian Aids Foundation chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir in her speech said currently more than 27,000 people in Malaysia are reported to be HIV-positive and mostly infected when they were young.

"We must start efforts to equip our young people with the knowledge to protect themselves from getting infected," she said.

This year's World Aids Day theme is "Force For Change: World Aids Campaign With Young People".

Marina then proposed several preventive measures, including HIV/Aids education programmes in schools, teen-oriented clubs and in places where young people meet such as discotheques and night clubs.

"We must give accurate and truthful information to young people, we must respect their rights to these kinds of education," she said.

Marina said Aids has become a youth-centered epidemic with 50 per cent of the 33.4 million Aids sufferers around the world being in the 10 - 24

years age group.

She said this development was worrisome because the age group was the most productive in any country and always spearheading nation-building efforts.

"We can already see countries in Africa, like Zimbabwe or Botswana, where because 25 per cent of adults are already HIV-positive, development in the country is severely affected.

"Life expectancy in Zimbabwe has been reduced by 22 years to only 41 years because of Aids and other African countries experienced a reduction in life expectancy of more than 10 years," she added.

-- BERNAMA

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