

30/06/2000

Debate likely at AIDS forum

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The assurance given by five pharmaceutical companies on the possibility of cheaper HIV/AIDS medicine for developing countries is expected to see heated debate at the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa.

This is because some participants are expected to pressure these companies to make their proposal a reality.

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said she expected protests to be staged during the conference which will see nearly 40 Malaysian delegates.

The Associated Press reported on May 11 that the five companies had announced they were joining forces to slash the cost of HIV/AIDS care in developing countries, especially Africa.

According to the report, this would be done by reducing the cost of their patented brands of medicine for governments and agencies in those countries.

Marina said that HIV/AIDS cases occurred more in developing countries, particularly in the African continent which is home to 22 million of the 34 million people worldwide who are HIV positive.

"Quite some time has passed since this issue was raised. People cannot afford to be patient any longer.

"Therefore, it is hoped that governments worldwide will take the lead to hold discussions with these companies as soon as possible," said Marina.

She said in Malaysia alone the cost of combination therapy consisting of two to three drugs stood at RM2,000 per month. This is after discounting AZT, which is dispensed free of charge by the Government.

"There are many people who cannot afford such expensive treatment, and are dying faster and earlier," she said.

Marina was speaking at a Press conference to announce the International AIDS Conference in Durban, at MAC's headquarters here today.

The conference, to be held from July 9 to 14, will see a large attendance which will include doctors, scientists, academicians, youths, caregivers and community workers dealing with HIV/AIDS.

(END)