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Chua-HIV

LIVES OF AIDS VICTIMS CANNOT BE PROLONGED AS DRUGS ARE COSTLY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 23 (Bernama) -- Lives of AIDS victims in developing countries cannot be prolonged as drugs produced by Western multinational companies are becoming increasingly expensive, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today.

These companies also were not permitting developing countries to produce the "anti-retroviral drugs" which could reduce the HIV and AIDS virus in the body, he said.

The drugs were being used only in the West where they could afford the high price being charged, he said.

Malaysia regretted the attitude of these companies, he said at a media conference after attending the Health Dialogue 2000 with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) here.

Millions of AIDS victims were hastening to their deaths in developing countries as they could not afford the expensive drugs from the West, Chua said.

At present 33.6 million people in the world had the HIV virus and AIDS.

However the pressure had been eased in hospitals of the West as the victims could return home and work once more with the help of these drugs which checked the progress of the disease.

Chua said the western multinationals were protecting their patents and not allowing developing countries to produce the anti-retroviral drugs.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had urged these companies to allow countries in Africa, South America and Asia to produce these drugs under "compulsory licensing" and "parallel importing,"

"This is a moral dilemma in this age where drugs which can help AIDS victims has been found in the West but they give priority to profits rather than saving the lives of people in developing countries," Chua said.

Five multinational companies had pledged at the recent WHO conference in Geneva to reduce the price of anti-retroviral drugs for developing countries but they had yet to act on their pledge.

The best way of reducing the price of the anti-retroviral drugs was to permit their production by developing countries, Chua said

He said the Asean Health Ministers Conference in Jogjakarta in April had resolved that the HIV and AIDS issue be discussed at the "Fourth Informal Asean Heads of Government Summit" in Singapore on Nov 24 and 25.

He also said the "The ASEAN Summit on HIV/Aids" will also be held in conjunction with the "7th ASEAN Heads of Government Summit" in Brunei next year.

An estimated 700,000 HIV and AIDS victims were in the Asean region at present, he said.

-- BERNAMA

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