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Religious bodies can play a role

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Religious institutions can play a role in the fight against HIV and AIDS by eradicating the stigma of being infected by the virus, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said today.

The stigma is the greatest barrier in preventing the spread of the disease as many become reluctant to be tested for HIV or seek treatment, she said.

"Besides spreading awareness to help prevent the spread of HIV, these institutions can offer care and support to those unfortunate enough to be infected."

Speaking at the launch of an Anti-Dadah/HIV/AIDS 2000 campaign, she said many of those infected with HIV were thrown out of their homes, ending up in alleys and dying without their family and friends.

"Who else can they turn to? There are non-governmental organisations, but we cannot cope with the numbers."

She said drug abuse and HIV infection incur losses not just socially but economically as they affected the youth, who were the country's hope in nation-building.

FT National Narcotics Agency director Hamzah Abas said there were less drug addicts arrested in the Federal Territory this year compared to last year.

The number of Malay drug addicts is on the decline, he said, but there was an increasing number of drug addicts among the Chinese and Indians.

According to the narcotic agency's records, 1,821 drug addicts, including 41 women, were arrested in the Federal Territory during the first six months of this year. Most of them were youths in the lower-income group.

Organised by Gereja Methodist Tamil Kuala Lumpur and FT National Narcotics Agency, the campaign, to end tomorrow, had seminars and exhibitions by various drugs and AIDS related agencies and NGOs.

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