

01/12/2000

Report on AIDS/HIV discrimination

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - A report on AIDS/HIV stigma and discrimination in Malaysia will be released by the Malaysian Aids Council on World AIDS Day tomorrow.

"Discrimination is extremely difficult to document," said MAC president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

"Those who experience it are often afraid to complain, because this may lead to more (discrimination).

"Stigma and discrimination is the largest barrier to prevention. It makes people hide their infection, hide everything.

"They don't want to come for testing for fear that they will be stigmatised just for being tested; they don't want to come for treatment.

"If they don't come forward, they won't be counselled. Therefore, they can spread (the infection) to others - out of ignorance."

Speaking in connection with the report, "Living with HIV/AIDS - Peer Documentation on Discrimination", she said: "There's this image that links women and AIDS to sex work; the assumption that women with HIV are usually sex workers.

"It's a major barrier to seeking treatment."

Citing evidence of people with AIDS being denied satisfactory hospital care; people being fired due to being HIV positive; and the disruption of schooling due merely to the association with AIDS, Marina stressed the need to respect basic human rights.

"If the rights to information and healthcare of marginalised communities such as drug users and sex workers are ignored, these vulnerable communities will unknowingly spread the virus to others.

"Stigma and discrimination happens," she said, "and it has serious implications for prevention and care in Malaysia."

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