

Tackling AIDS scourge the Uganda way

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. — The Malaysian Aids Council (MAC) will be bringing a group of Islamic leaders to Uganda in November to learn a more effective approach in dealing with the AIDS scourge.

MAC president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said the study tour would allow Islamic organisations in this country to assist in the counselling of AIDS patients.

“The programme in Uganda, organised by the Uganda Islamic Medical Association, is a success and has been recognised as the best approach by the United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids or UN-AIDS,” she said.

She said this after presenting her working paper at the one-day Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) held at a hotel here today.

It was opened by Deputy Home Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin.

Marina said the working visit would only comprise 10 to 15 religious leaders as their budget was minimal.

She hoped the visit could be held at the same time with the International Consultation on Islam and HIV/AIDS, also to be held in Uganda, so that the religious leaders could also participate in the event.

Marina also said the programme in Uganda was community-based, which also took into account one’s income generation as a factor.

“The beauty of the Ugandan programme is that it realises that the poor are the ones more vulnerable to the disease. So, when one includes income generation activities in AIDS education, that takes care of the problem.”

“It is very effective and very realistic. We hope the religious leaders we will be bringing would come back and implement the programme here,” she added.

On the involvement of the various local Islamic bodies in the effort to tackle the HIV/AIDS issue, Marina said they were rather slow in reacting towards this issue.

Earlier, during a question-and-

answer session, she said they had never sidelined the religious approach to educate the public on HIV/AIDS.

She said this was because such approach was recognised internationally as one of the effective ways to tackle the issue.

“We in Malaysia have always worked closely with the religious bodies. We had a colloquium about two years ago which was attended by nine out of 13 mufti in the country.”

The MAC has 33 affiliated bodies including the Malaysian Consultative Council on Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism and the Islamic Medical Association.

She said, as of the end of last year, there were nearly 40,000 HIV carriers in the country with more than 95 per cent being men.

Based on ethnic groups, she said about 72.5 per cent of HIV carriers were Malays, 15.3 per cent were Chinese and Indians came up to 3.7 per cent, while the remainder were those of the minority ethnic groups.

The forum also witnessed the presentation of two other working papers *on Elimination of Violence Against Women*, and *Reproductive Health*.

The working papers were presented by AFPPD deputy secretary-general Datuk Napsiah Omar and Regional International Planned Parenthood Federation for East and Southeast Asia director Datuk Dr Raj Karim respectively.