

05 NOV 2001

Asean-Declaration (HIV/Aids)

ASEAN TO EMBARK ON JOINT EFFORT TO TACKLE HIV/AIDS

By: David Chelliah

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Nov 5 (Bernama) -- Asean leaders today agreed to tackle HIV/Aids collectively through regional and international actions and called for the establishment of a global HIV/Aids and health fund with equal opportunities for member countries to access the fund.

The Asean leaders endorsed the Declaration on HIV/Aids at the Seventh Asean Leaders Summit here and urged Asean dialogue partners China, Japan and South Korea and international bodies to support the actions undertaken by Asean to fight the scourge.

The leaders agreed to strengthen regional mechanisms, increase access to affordable drugs, expand prevention strategies and support international efforts to tackle HIV/Aids in a comprehensive manner.

The Asean leaders also adopted the Asean Work Programme on HIV/Aids and pledged to work together towards accomplishing regional activities in support of national programmes and joint regional actions.

The four-page declaration revealed that 1.7 million people are living with HIV/Aids in the Asean region and the number is rapidly increasing through risk behaviour.

The Asean leaders also agreed to exchange information on HIV/Aids through the formulation and implementation of joint policies and programmes.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad initiated the idea for Asean to have a special session on HIV/Aids following the growing number of such cases in the region.

According to figures, at the end of 1999, the number of people living with HIV/Aids in Thailand was 695,000, 530,000 in Myanmar, 169,000 in Cambodia, 100,000 in Vietnam, 52,000 in Indonesia, 49,000 in Malaysia, 28,000 in the Philippines, 4,000 in Singapore, 1,400 in Laos and 100 in Brunei.

Asean also expressed concern over price differences for AZT for one member country to another and the affordability of people in Vietnam, Thailand, Laos or Cambodia to purchase such drugs on a long term.

The leaders also reiterated the call of the Hanoi Declaration adopted in the last summit in 1998 which ensures that adequate medical care and access to essential medicines and cooperation should be stepped up in the control and prevention of communicable diseases including HIV/Aids.

The grouping also reaffirmed its commitment to pursue the Joint Declaration for a Drug-Free Asean adopted by the 33rd Asean Ministerial Meeting last year.

The Asean leaders also agreed to monitor and evaluate the activities at all levels and systematically conduct periodic reviews and information-sharing with the participation of non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations.

The leaders also endorsed education and life skills training for youths and effective prevention of sexual transmission of HIV for mothers, children and drug users.

They also agreed to intensify inter-ministerial collaboration at the national and international levels to implement programmes and support technical, financial and human resources to adequately advocate for and implement national and regional programmes to tackle HIV/Aids.

Asean comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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