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Campaign to ensure well-being of children

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - In a move to instil awareness of the importance of children in our lives, the National Unity and Social Development Ministry will launch a campaign called "Say Yes for Children" on Sept 1.

Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said the campaign, to be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, would look at ways to create a conducive and enabling environment for children to grow up.

She said the campaign was based on 10 imperative actions and responsibilities. It aims to deliver the message that the citizens of the country care about children and expects everyone to keep the promises they make for their well-being.

The campaign is part of the global movement for children which is a broad-based campaign to ensure greater action for children, holding governments accountable in the lead-up to and after the United Nations Special Session on Children to be held from Sept 18 to 24 in New York.

Siti Zaharah said the campaign would also take stock of the progress the country had made since the last World Summit for Children in 1990.

She said there was no time-frame for the campaign as children would always be there and they constantly needed the attention of adults.

Several programmes have been lined up for the campaign such as forums, walkathon, talk shows and concerts.

Siti Zaharah said 30 per cent of the population were below 15 years old and adults, especially young parents, should be made aware of a child's needs.

"They must know the physical and mental needs of children."

The 10 actions are: leave no child out, put children first, care for every child, fight HIV/AIDS, stop harming and exploiting children, listen to children, educate every child, protect children from war, protect the earth for children and fight poverty and invest in children.

Leave no child out means that because every girl and boy is born free and equal in dignity and rights, all forms of discrimination and exclusion against children must end.

Put children first calls on governments to meet their obligations to children and young people.

At the same time, it also calls on individuals, non-governmental organisations, religious groups, the private sector, and children and adolescents themselves to recognise the responsibility to ensure that children's rights are respected.

Siti Zaharah said care for every child meant that all children must enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, especially through immunisation, good nutrition and diet, clean water and adequate sanitation, proper housing and a safe and healthy environment.

She said fight HIV/AIDS called for children, adolescents and their families to be protected from the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS.

Stop harming and exploiting calls for the violence and abuse of children to be stopped.

It also calls for the end of sexual and economic exploitation of children.

Siti Zaharah said many adults assumed that children did not have the right to voice their opinion on any issue. "This must change and we must listen to what they have to say."

She said everyone must respect the right of children and young people to express themselves and to participate in decisions that affected them, consistent with their evolving capabilities.