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Council against restriction of condom sales

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Malaysian Aids Council today voiced its disapproval for the proposed restriction of condom sales in Selangor, saying it would "probably be the single most dangerous thing to do."

Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said claims that selling condoms openly contributed to promiscuity and more HIV infections would have to be supported by evidence.

"At the moment condom sales are not restricted and we still have HIV/AIDS. Can you imagine if you restricted it even more what the rate (of infection) would be like?" she asked.

She also said with a restriction on condom sales there would be more unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

"You expect HIV positive people to be responsible and not infect others but at the same time make it difficult for them. How do you reconcile that?" she said.

She was speaking today after a HIV/AIDS public forum in the National Science Centre at Bukit Kiara.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng was also present as a guest speaker and voiced out a need for better communication between the Health Ministry, State Governments and religious authorities on the issue.

"Controversial matters will then be addressed at the root before it is formulated publicly. We will have to ask the State directors to address policymakers at State level and to religious authorities as to whether this (proposal) is advisable," he said.

On Tuesday the Selangor Government had agreed with the State Youth Council's proposal that there should be restricted selling of condoms and they should be sold only at clinics, hospitals and pharmacies.

The Selangor Fatwa Committee has also added support for the proposal.

State Youth Council president Datuk Abdul Rahman Palil had said on Tuesday that the current practice of selling condoms openly had yet to show positive results in combating the HIV/AIDS problem in the country.

Chua said: "I want to know on what basis did he make this conclusion. This is not the view of doctors and experts nationally and internationally who agree that the use of condoms is an effective way to combat not only HIV and AIDS, but prevent sexually transmitted diseases."

"This is recognised by the World Health Organisation, international bodies and many Islamic countries."

He said that for effective policies to be made there had to be a process of "inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial" information-sharing.

"We will need to know what they mean by restricted sale. There are people practising different religions and within a religion itself there are differences of opinion.

"The most important thing is to make sure these opinions are informed opinions."

He said the opinions of the State directors of the Health Ministry, who are experts in the field of medicine, were usually accepted by State Governments.

Meanwhile Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Shahrizat Jalil said today that if the sale of condoms were restricted, people would not be protected against sexually transmitted diseases.

"The key to solving this is education and protection," she said after the Eastin Telekasih Launch in Eastin Hotel.

"Educating the young is the best form of protection and the only way for them to know what is right and wrong."
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