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## Declaration on AIDS endorsed

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ASEAN leaders yesterday endorsed the Seventh Asean Summit Declaration on HIV/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, calling for stronger regional co-operation to combat the spread of the disease and greater regional collaboration to make affordable drugs more accessible to people living with Aids.

They also called on member states to make the fight against HIV/AIDS a national priority and for greater efforts to establish an accesible Global HIV/AIDS fund.

The leaders also agreed to reduce the vulnerability of mobile population to HIV infections and to provide them with care, treatment and information.

They also called on Asean members to collaborate in areas like effective prevention of sexual transmission of HIV, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and risk behaviours, treatment care and support for people living with and affected by HIV and prevention of mother to child transmission.

Recognising that at least 1.7 million people are living with HIV in Southeast Asia, the leaders also agreed to strengthen regional co-ordination among agencies working with youths.

The declaration said the leaders agreed to consider the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a national priority and to integrate its prevention, care, treatment and mitigation priorities in the mainstream of national development plans.

They will also promote the creation of a positive environment in confronting stigma, silence, denial, elimination of discrimination, addressing the prevention, treatment, care and support of those in the vulnerable groups and people at risks, particularly young people and women.

The proposal for Asean leaders to discuss the HIV/AIDS epidemic was made by Malaysia.

Under an agreement reached at their summit in Singapore last year, the leaders convened a session on HIV/AIDS to consider an Asean Work Programme in this area.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made the proposal at the Fifth International Congress on Aids in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) in Kuala Lumpur in October 1999.

The primary objective of the session on HIV/AIDS is to mobilise solidarity and political support to make HIV/AIDS a national priority and collaborate on inter-country/cross-border issues and exchange of technical expertise.

The declaration also acknowledged that prevention, treatment, care and support for those infected by HIV/AIDS are mutually reinforcing elements that must be integrated in a comprehensive approach to combat the epidemic.

The leaders also agreed to intensify and strengthen multisectoral co-operation involving all development ministries, non-governmental organisations, the business sector, media, community-based organisations, religious leaders, families, citizens as well as people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Inter-ministerial collaboration at the national and international levels will also be intensified to combat the epidemic.

In Asean countries, HIV/AIDS was first recorded in the early 1980s and

has continued to spread at varying rates. By the end of 1999 there were an estimated 1.63 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the Asean region.

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