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WHO-AIDS

M'SIAN AIDS PROGRAMMME SHOULD TARGET SEX WORKERS AND ADDICTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 (Bernama) -- Malaysia should be very focused in its AIDS prevention programme by targeting sex workers and drug-users, a World Health Organisation (WHO) official said today.

The WHO representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, Dr U.H Susantha De Silva said efforts should be concentrated on this target group instead of targeting HIV-testing on the general population.

"They should concentrate with sex workers and drug-users. We find that in Cambodia for example, usage of condoms in a big way has reduced the cases," he said at a special press briefing organised by the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC).

At the briefing, dubbed "Testing Is Not Prevention", Dr DeSilva referred to a Johor government ruling requiring compulsory HIV test for couples planning marriage in the state.

He said such testing, done without individual consent, would not be in the interest of public health.

Dr De Silva said compulsory HIV testing would cause social stigma and discrimination that would drive "people to go into hiding or underground when they refuse to come forward for the test".

According to him, even countries such as Cuba and Mongolia, which were trying to implement compulsory HIV testing, had eventually aborted the move after much consideration.

"Johor will eventually become the first state in the Asia-Pacific region to implement such ruling," he said.

MAC president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said she would recommend that AIDS prevention be included in pre-marital courses as compulsory testing would not stop the disease from spreading.

"We will be distributing cards to the people there (Johor) on our hotline numbers so that they could contact us to find out more about HIV," she said.

Health Ministry statistics for the 1986-June 2001 period showed Malaysia having 40,877 HIV cases.

This year alone, from January to June, there were 2,537 HIV cases in the country.

-- BERNAMA

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