

06 DEC 2001
Marina-AIDS
SET UP NATIONAL COUNCIL ON AIDS, SAYS MARINA

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- A national council on AIDS under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister needs to be set up to spearhead actions to the fight againsts HIV/AIDS, said Malaysian AIDS Council President Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir today.

She said participation from the top leadership would help in streamlining activities by relevant bodies and organisations, besides reducing obstacles in implementing the activities.

This could be seen in neighbouring countries like Thailand where Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra headed the National Council on AIDS while in Indonesia, President Megawati Sukarnoputri had led the people in a parade to mark the World AIDS Day recently, said when presenting a paper at a one-day forum on "HIV/AIDS Situation in Malaysia: Are We Doing Enough?" in conjunction with World AIDS Day 2001 here.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng was one of panelists in the forum which was attended by Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood and Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob.

Marina said that the number of HIV/AIDS cases reported had reached 5,000 a year while the number of women infected had increased from one per cent to 10 per cent over the last 10 years.

With the increasing figures of HIV/AIDS infected and death cases, she said there was also a need for the country to get the real number of infected cases since many people still had no idea that they were infected while some preferred to be tested and treated elsewhere.

Adding to that, she said, there was still a vast unknown information about the epidemic such as what really made people vulnerable to the disease and their locations, besides how to help them prevent infection.

"There is also the question of why we have not been able to prevent HIV among drug users," she said.

Chua meanwhile said the government had come out with various programmes to control the epidemic, among the successful ones being the screening programme of antenatal mothers introduced in 1998.

Under the programme, the government was able to stamp the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to newborn by giving HIV positive mothers drugs treatment, he said.

"By end of last year, 723,117 antenatal mothers had been screened, with 210 of them (0.03 per cent) tested positive. 193 of the HIV positive mothers had given birth, with only 11 babies tested positive, giving a transmission rate of 5.7 per cent," he said.

Chua said that in looking for other alternatives in treating HIV/AIDS, the ministry had sent a team of medical officials to Cuba to study the "ozone treatment".

The treatment which had been used in Cuba was reportedly cheap and had no adverse side effect on the patients, he said.

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