

18 MAY 2002

Chua-AIDS

AIDS COUNCIL GETS QUARTER MILLION RINGGIT BOOST FROM MINISTRY

KUALA LUMPUR, May 18 (Bernama) -- The Health Ministry will provide RM250,000 to part cover the operational cost of the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) for this year, its minister, Datuk Chua Jui Meng said today.

This will be in addition to the government grant of RM1 for every RM1 donation collected by MAC up to a maximum of RM1 million, he said.

The RM250,000 allocation was decided at a meeting between ministry officials and MAC representatives recently, he told reporters after the opening of a photography exhibition on "Positive Lives, Positive Responses to HIV" at the National Art Gallery here.

The exhibition, which showcases 250 photographs depicting the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS throughout Asia as well as Australia, Africa, USA and United Kingdom will be held until June 12, 2002.

Chua said his ministry viewed MAC as an important partner in educating the public about HIV/AIDS and in creating awareness about the disease.

MAC president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir expressed gratitude for every sen allocated by the government to the council but stressed that the NGO needed RM2 million annually to run its programmes, while part of the amount went towards treatment of AIDS patients.

"Our needs are expanding over time. It is a constant struggle," she said.

She also said the number of HIV/AIDS cases had gone up, (totalling about 45,000 cases last year), as the public misunderstood the disease.

"People don't understand what it is all about. They are under the impression that it won't happen to them and to someone they know," she said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who earlier opened the exhibition told reporters that prejudice and negative perception towards AIDS patients should be stopped.

He said such attitudes could worsen the patient's condition.

-- BERNAMA

MAD RZS ANA