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'Impact of war will cripple healthcare system'

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The long-term impact of war will cripple the healthcare system and make victims of people, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said today.

She said in a country like Iraq, whose existing healthcare and infrastructure have already been weakened by sanctions, a possible war may destroy remaining facilities, posing a big problem to the people's health, especially in view of the worsening AIDS epidemic.

"War cannot help prevention (of AIDS) and instead exacerbate its condition."

An unstable country does not have resources to tackle the epidemic and therefore, with healthcare facilities in ruin, the battle against AIDS would be very arduous, she said.

"Trillions of dollars are allocated towards military budgets and yet 7,000 people are dying each day from AIDS."

All that was needed of that amount was a fraction to finance the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria yearly, she told reporters after unveiling a banner bearing the slogan of the Council's peace campaign, which reads "War Spreads AIDS, Peace is Healthier" outside its office.

As part of the effort, 5,000 car stickers have also been printed for distribution to raise consciousness about war and its consequences.

Marina said war could also cause the AIDS epidemic to spread from rape, as well as the poor living conditions among refugees, which make them vulnerable to the disease.

"The consequences of war are beyond what is on paper ... human consequences are often forgotten.

"War is not a game ... War will bear immediate and long term effect on people, with consequences reaching several generations ... and you can't walk away from them as you can in a game," she said.