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Changing HIV/AIDS perception

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The United Nations Development Programme launched a leadership training programme today in an effort to combat HIV/AIDS by educating people on the different approaches that need to be taken.

UNDP Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei resident representative Dr Maxine Olson said the programme aimed to change the way HIV/AIDS was perceived in the country.

"UNDP sees its role first as developmental but more specifically, as creating an enabling environment where the values of freedom from stigma and discrimination, gender equality, access to information, livelihood, care and treatment are upheld."

She said it was only when these values became society's norm that the spread of the epidemic could be curbed.

In order to do so, Olson said strong leadership was needed to initiate a paradigm shift by educating others to create an environment that changed mindset and attitude.

"This leadership can be found in all levels of society and should be based on a sensitive and responsible understanding of the epidemic and the social and cultural factors that fuel it.

"In Malaysia, we are challenged to move from a mixture of apathy, growing concern and discrimination of those infected to a commitment to address the threat before the epidemic spreads to all sectors of society," Olson said.

The three-day "UNDP Leadership for Results" training programme is to promote such leadership among the 160 participants.

The participants are academicians, students and healthcare providers as well as those from the media, the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

Present was Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir.