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External evaluation for Malaysian AIDS Council

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Malaysian AIDS Council and its affiliates will soon undergo an external evaluation by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to improve its strategies and programmes in meeting the challenges of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country.

Malaysian AIDS Council president and chairperson of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the council would take into account any recommendations by UNAIDS to reorganise or restructure its operations in response to the HIV/AIDS situation in Malaysia.

"We are the first non-governmental organisation in the world that is inviting UNAIDS to evaluate us to see whether we are providing the right services... What I wish for personally is to have more people doing the thinking, the strategising on how to respond to the epidemic and (placing) less dependence on me," she said.

"We believe we are not working at optimum levels. I think it's very important for organisations like us to constantly question ourselves."

She was speaking after presenting the biennial Malaysian AIDS Council's Red Ribbon Media Awards 2002 to seven members of the media for their work on HIV/AIDS in the print and broadcast media at a hotel here today.

Among the recipients were New Straits Times's Loretta Ann Soosayraj whose winning entry was "Testing Time in Fight against HIV/AIDS", Hatipah Ahmad (Berita Harian) and Tang Lee Ping (Sin Chew Jit Poh).

New Straits Times YouthQuake's Rina Omar was awarded a special mention certificate for her eye-opening feature "Still Blur About HIV/AIDS".

Earlier, Marina said the winners from various categories were selected based on entries that were deemed very high in standards of professionalism, insight and commitment towards responsible reporting on HIV/AIDS.

"The award is our simple way of saying 'thank you' to members of the media, organisations and individuals for their invaluable help in getting the message of HIV/AIDS education across," she said.

She hoped the awards would encourage the media to present accurate facts to the public on HIV/AIDS.

On the newly set-up Ikhlas Drop-In Centre for women drug abusers in Chow Kit, Marina urged medical doctors to volunteer their services at the centre as there were no full-time doctor at the centre.

"It's a centre which provides a safe place for women and men drug abusers to come and get medical attention if they need it, have a shower, food and while they're there it's easy for us to provide HIV/AIDS education to them," she said, adding that they were not allowed to use or sell drugs on the premises.