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Marina: Government should work closely with AIDS groups

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government should work closely with grassroots AIDS/HIV welfare groups to ensure the success of its AIDS/HIV awareness programmes, said Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir.

She said the Government's AIDS campaigns had so far only misled the public and patients.

Speaking after the Seri Basariah Award presentation ceremony here today, she said: "Despite the campaigns, we see AIDS/HIV cases steadily rising in the country, touching about 50,000.

"The tone of the campaigns, especially via posters put up by the Health Ministry, could actually have discouraged many sufferers from coming forward and seeking treatment."

She said posters that proclaimed there was no treatment or cure for AIDS and condemned sufferers were not conducive in creating public awareness of the disease.

She said most of the posters, including those for Prostar (Program Remaja Sihat Tanpa AIDS), could not relate to the public about the disease.

"Our council and bodies like Positive Living, which is a support group for HIV-positive persons, have first-hand knowledge about the disease.

"We should be consulted for the running of government campaigns involving AIDS/HIV."

She said the Health Ministry could depend on AIDS/HIV welfare groups to do the grassroots work for it.

She said it was only through such multi-sectorial participation that the country could hope to contain the disease. She said the main causes of AIDS/HIV in the country were needle sharing by drug addicts followed by unprotected sex.

PL project co-ordinator Roslan Hamzah called on religious leaders to adopt AIDS sufferers and HIV carriers to better understand their plight. "In this way, they can work out proper religious modules to help fight the disease.

"This will also help sufferers and carriers from being stigmatised by their family and society."

At today's function, PL gave the Seri Basariah Award to Jack Singh, the longest-surviving HIV-positive individual in Malaysia.

He was a pioneer in setting up PL and the Global Network For People Living with HIV/AIDS and Asia Pacific Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS.

His mother Mohinder Kaur, 66, who received the award, said her son, who was diagnosed with the disease in the 1980s, overcame the initial shock and depression to help others like himself. "Working with the late Basariah, my son spearheaded and organised self-help organisations for people afflicted with AIDS and HIV."