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Muslim leaders to discuss AIDS

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Second International Muslim Leaders' Consultation on HIV/AIDS aimed at creating awareness of the disease will be held here next week.

The conference, jointly organised by the Malaysian AIDS Council and the Department of Islamic Development (Jakim) from May 19 to 23, will be attended by 300 participants from 38 Muslim countries.

Based on the theme "A Caring Ummah: Transforming the Response" the conference will include community leaders from non-governmental bodies and experts from around the world.

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said the conference was a follow up to the first one held in Kampala, Uganda in 2001.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Hamid Zainal Abidin concurred that AIDS awareness among the community here was not viewed seriously by many people.

The conference will focus on five areas: human dignity, vulnerability, sexuality, drug use and the role played by Muslim leaders pertaining to HIV/AIDS. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Associate Professor Norani Othman said workshops would be held to allow participants to exchange views and share ideas on AIDS.

Open to invitees only the conference will be addressed by, among others, International Islamic University's Prof Mohd Kamal Hassan, and Ugandan mufti Sheikh Shaban Mubajje.