

# 'Prevent needless deaths'

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## Public health needs attention, says Abdullah

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The quality of public health in OIC member countries should be raised, as infants and children in the Islamic countries face the highest risk in the spread of infectious diseases and mortality rates.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it was unfortunate that the population in Muslim countries had been left behind in combating mortality rates and risked more in catching infectious diseases.

He said that seven of the 10 OIC nations in the 56-member grouping had the highest infant mortality rates, while very few Islamic countries including Malaysia, Bahrain

and Brunei, registered infant mortality rates of lower than 10 per 1,000 live births.

The situation was also compounded by a funding gap in the production of immunisation vaccines among OIC members, he added.

"The state of public health in Muslim countries is a tragedy, not only because the outlook is bleak. It's because there is so much we can do to prevent needless deaths and suffering," he said in his keynote address at the launch of the Kuala Lumpur OIC-Health Ministerial Conference 2007 here yesterday.

Abdullah said while there had been initiatives to improve the quality of health in Islamic countries

through funding by the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank, OIC member states needed to enhance cooperation and bring it up several levels.

He said that one area that was ripe for further collaboration was self-reliance in vaccine production, and called on OIC members to collaborate in the production of halal vaccines.

Abdullah advised Muslim countries to be transparent to other stakeholders such as the World Health Organisation and The Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention in the United States in tackling serious threats to public health.

"We need to recognise the impor-

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DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI

tance of public health to the development of the *ummah* and discussions on health within the framework of the OIC.

"More critically, we must pool our resources, share expertise and work together to improve the condition of the *ummah*," he added.