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**Proud moment:** Dr Siti Hasmah receiving the Kiwanis Humanitarian Public Service Award 2015 from Petrisin (second right), while Dr Mahathir and Fatimah lend support.

# 'Accept special needs people'

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Siti Hasmah: They didn't choose to be disabled

By **JOSEPH KAOS Jr** and **RAHMAH GHAZALI**  
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

**PUTRAJAYA:** Do not exclude special needs people from society as they need support from the community, said Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali.

They are human beings with their own abilities, and so should always be given encouragement, said the wife of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Don't shun special needs people. They did not choose to be disabled. We must educate our own children to be friends with children who are disabled or have special needs," she told reporters after receiving the Humanitarian Public Service Award from Kiwanis International here yesterday.

"I once visited a factory in Eindhoven in Holland where they had workers who were sufferers of Down Syndrome. They were good at their work and very hardworking.

"They don't ask for sympathy. What they want is support and encouragement.

"I am honoured to receive this award. I did a lot of work with Kiwanis, especially Down Syndrome kids. I'm humbled."

Dr Siti Hasmah, who turns 90 next year, said she would not be able to be as active as before in her humanitarian work.

"As you know, I'm getting younger, right?" she asked in jest.

The Kiwanis Humanitarian Public Service Award is given to recognise individuals for their "outstanding leadership and contributions", especially to women and children.

"Kiwanis International is proud to give this award to Tun Dr Siti Hasmah based on her sterling role in helping to alleviate a broad range of problems relating to family planning, paediatrics, mental health, rural women and disadvantaged children for more than three decades," said Kiwanis International president Sue Petrisin, who presented the award yesterday.

Also present were Dr Mahathir, Kiwanis Malaysia governor Datuk Fatimah Saad, former MCA president Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik and his wife Toh Puan Ena Ling, who is also the patron of Kiwanis Down Syndrome Foundation National Centre. Kiwanis celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

On another topic, Dr Siti Hasmah noted that the calls among some parents to reject vaccinations for their children was a reflection that they were going backwards.

As a medical doctor with 22 years of service, she said: "I worked alongside many doctors and staff. We had to work very hard to reduce the fatality rate among mothers and children."

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