

**Investing In Well-being Of Girls, Women Is A Smart Move - Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said investing in girls' and women's education, health, safety, rights and financial independence not only pays but is also a smart investment.

He said there were undeniable values in such investments as when girls and women were empowered, the benefits would extend beyond the individuals.

"Freed from the unnatural constraints of inequality, women can realise their potential as active participants in the community and in the world," he said.

Addressing the 3rd Global Conference on Women Deliver 2013 here today, Najib spoke about the government's commitment to ensure that the health and well-being of girls and women in this country were viewed as priorities, not mere afterthoughts.

Najib noted that with the government's re-election came new and increased commitment to empower women and girls in an effort to drive the nation's development forward.

"Every girl and woman in Malaysia, regardless of her religion, political affiliation, social status or location, deserves a safe, healthy and prosperous life. Our national, regional and global stability depends on it," Najib said.

Present were his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, who is also patron of the conference, Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Rohani Abdul Karim and Women Deliver president Jill Sheffield.

More than 3,000 delegates, including policymakers, advocates and international leaders representing over 150 countries, are attending the three-day conference beginning Tuesday.

Malaysia is the first Asian country to be given the honour to host the global conference previously held in London and Washington D.C.

The event is touted as the largest global conference of the decade to focus on the health and well-being of girls and women. It is organised by Women Deliver which is headquartered in New York.

Najib said as Malaysia strove to become a developed nation by the end of the decade, the challenge was to ensure that the country's economic growth was truly inclusive with opportunities created and open to all citizens, and women were afforded the same rights, respect and opportunities as men.

"That will not happen from the top-down, change must come in the workplace, in the villages, in the mind of all Malaysians," he said.

He noted that health advocates and experts must be ready to engage in dialogue with faith leaders to dispel negative perceptions on matters pertaining to girls' and women's health.

Women and girls, he said, must be empowered to make informed choices and take personal responsibility for their health within a social fabric that encouraged it.

The prime minister said problems like teenage pregnancies, abandoned babies, early marriage and sexually transmitted infections must be addressed without stigma or discrimination.

"This will sometimes require a change in mindset, a willingness to look again at our approach, to ask ourselves whether we're doing all we can to put girls' and women's health first," he said.

He stressed the importance of educating girls on their health and well-being which he believed would further lower maternal mortality and morbidity rates, help halt the spread of diseases including HIV and AIDS as well as improve child health and nutrition.

Investing in universal education without gender discrimination had yielded results beyond expectations, but the challenge for Malaysia, as for many other countries, was to ensure that success in the classroom carried over into life outside it, he added.

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