

Penyampai : DATO' SERI DR. SITI HASMAH BT HAJI MOHD. ALI  
Tajuk : PELANCARAN PROJEK AISBERG - "HIV/AIDS-LEBIH DARIPADA YANG DILIHAT"  
Lokasi : HOTEL J.W. MARRIOT, KUALA LUMPUR  
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Saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada pihak penganjur kerana menjemput saya pada hari ini untuk melancarkan "Projek Aisberg - "HIV/AIDS - Lebih Daripada Yang Dilihat".

2. Saya merasa gembira dapat hadir kerana projek ini adalah satu projek yang amat penting untuk usaha menyedari rakyat umum, khasnya golongan muda, akan peningkatan insiden HIV/AIDS dan bahaya serta kesannya terhadap golongan muda.

3. About 2,000 people become infected with the HIV virus every 24 hours in the Asia Pacific. In the year 2000, there were reported 38,044 HIV cases, 4,649 AIDS cases and 3,538 cases of death from AIDS in Malaysia (Sources: Ministry of Health, Malaysia). This means that the possible HIV/AIDS epidemic in our country could be devastating for our nation. The rapid increase of HIV/AIDS cases poses immediate danger to individuals, families, women and children. The spread of HIV/AIDS is a serious threat to the region and is already undoing many gains achieved in children's survival, protection and development during the past decade.

4. HIV/AIDS touches children in many ways. Families become poorer because their breadwinners are unable to earn while family medical bills rise. Widows and orphans lose their inheritance and are left with nothing. Because of poverty and parental illness children may have to leave school to cut costs, provide care or earn an income. Family meals become less nutritious. Families taking in children orphaned by AIDS are usually part of the extended family and may lack resources to provide proper care.

5. Many people still assume that affected children must also be HIV infected and infectious. The fact is, even without medical intervention on average less than a third of babies born to HIV positive mothers become infected. Even those children who have HIV/AIDS can safely play with other children.

6. However because of the misinformation, affected children are excluded from schools, childcare centres and even medical treatment. Affected children are branded as "AIDS" kid and parents tell their children not to go near them. The prolonged distress this causes, coupled with grief at the loss of loved ones and uncertainty about the future, can leave the affected child with deep emotional and psychological wounds.

7. Therefore, there is a great deal of work to be done to prepare children, young people, men and women towards an informed, positive, healthy and wholesome lifestyle. Educating and involving our young is not the sole responsibility of the Government alone. It is necessary to involve the concerted efforts and alliance of groups of people, the public, private sectors, organisations and NGOs from every sector of society. All segments of a civil society are accountable for the well being of her people and her children.

8. This project called "Project Iceberg" actually depicts what an iceberg is: Much of what can be seen above the sea level is just one tenth of the total bulk of the iceberg. Nine tenths are below the water surface and therefore is comparable to the Iceberg. We have figures of HIV/AIDS sufferers but how many more of them out there who shunned help and treatment because of fear, stigma, ignorance and too ill to come forward, we don't know.

9. A gigantic and sophisticated liner like the Titanic went down by an iceberg. We won't want all our efforts, programmes, money and time go down like the Titanic because we do not reach the more significant number of people of all ages who are sufferers and those who are potential sufferers.

10. Therefore, this project called Iceberg truly appeal to all of us to join in and help to play our role in the nation's campaign against HIV/AIDS. Everyone of us has a responsibility to ourselves, our families, community and nation. We may not able to treat the patients ourselves but the least we can do is to educate the public in a prevention campaign by talking to them. Preventive education campaigns must have all the information about HIV/AIDS infection ready and available. It should be frank, and simply

worded.

"Ignorance is bliss" and "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" no longer hold water in such situations. Given the choice, we would rather have the knowledge than run the risk of being in a dangerous situation through sheer ignorance.

11. As this juncture, I would like to congratulate the joint organisers Wanita MCA, Malaysian AIDS Council and Sin Chew Jit Poh for initiating this "pilot" project to educate, raise awareness levels and disseminate correct information about HIV/AIDS through a quiz and elocution competition for 1422 Chinese national type and Chinese independent schools.

12. I am made to understand that this is the first time that a political party, an NGO and the private sector have come together to commit to such a specific action in search for effective ways to combat the dangers of HIV/AIDS and to educate school children to change attitudes and behaviours so that they may be part of a solution towards the urgent need to curb the rapidly growing HIV rates in Malaysia.

13. It is my sincerest hope that when it comes to children and young people, we in Malaysia can show the rest of the world that the rights of children to survival, protection, development and participation can and will be ensured and that this pilot project is one of many more of such projects. I would encourage other communities in Malaysia to use this example and continue the social responsibility we have for nurturing our young people for the future.

14. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to launch the Project Iceberg - "HIV/AIDS - More Than What You See" (Projek Aisberg - "HIV/AIDS - Lebih Daripada Yang Dilihat") and to wish this project every success.