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HIV/AIDS SEMINAR

“LISTEN to Their Voices, ACT on the Evidence!”

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Dr. Ang Eng Suan

UNCT Colleagues

Colleagues and members of the media

A very good morning to all

Saya berasa amat gembira pada hari ini dan berbesar hati kerana diberi peluang untuk memberi sepatah dua kata di seminar ini.

I am really pleased to see the many committed professionals, including the media, at today's seminar. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team of researchers, headed by Dr. Siti Norazah, Dr. Adeeba, Dr. Jalal and I am honoured to have each one of them, experts in their own fields, with us today to present the findings of their research.

HIV, like all infectious diseases, transcends geography. In Malaysia, the first case of HIV infection was reported in 1986. Since then numbers of new cases have risen exponentially. By the end of June 2006, roughly 73,500 Malaysians were reported as infected with HIV, of whom some 11,000 had developed AIDS. Over 90 per cent of HIV infections are males and about 70 per cent are Malays. And with the rising prevalence, adolescent girls and women are increasingly at risk.

HIV/AIDS remains one of the world's most serious development crises. It has far reaching implications on societies, communities and families. HIV/AIDS is undermining economic growth, increasing poverty, destroying human and social capital, and reversing development progress. Halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS in Malaysia remain one of the few Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) targets yet to be achieved.

In response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS Malaysia initiated a study on the "Impact of HIV/AIDS on PLHIV (People Living with HIV), their families and communities in Malaysia". The outcomes of this study will provide invaluable inputs in strengthening Malaysia's policy and programmes on HIV/AIDS, as well as increasing PLHIV's participation in policy and decision-making on prevention strategies, serving the needs of PLHIV.

The research focus was to assess the impact of HIV/AIDS on people affected by the disease and their families and communities. I would like to briefly highlight some of the findings, with considerable policy relevance, that will be discussed later this morning.

There is strong evidence of stigmatization and discrimination of PLHIV (People Living with HIV) from healthcare providers, employers, communities and within the family.

Condom use is poor among men infected with HIV, even among clients of sex workers who may be exposed to high risk of HIV and STIs. This resistance to condom use involves denial of risk and is rooted in a lack of male responsibility. Sex workers have limited negotiating powers.

The economic impact of HIV, through death of the family breadwinner or resignation due to coercion or ill health, disproportionately affects women, especially single parents, and regardless of gender, those of lower education and income-earning capacity. A stronger gender focus in HIV/AIDS is required.

NGOs and community-based organizations, in collaboration with government agencies, play a critical role in the lives of PLHIV, facilitating access to treatment, care and support, especially for the populations such as refugees, sex workers and transgender.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All United Nations agencies in Malaysia are scaling up their efforts in support of national response to reduce the spread of HIV infection. We will support initiatives linked to the findings of the study reported this morning. We would like to see a supportive national network of PLHIV. The research findings will help support the national response to HIV as delineated in the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2006-2010.

Without the effective implementation of relevant multi-sectoral policies, there remains little hope in halting and reversing the spread of HIV in Malaysia. HIV/AIDS is not merely a health problem. HIV/AIDS must be positioned as a cross-cutting development issue that calls for multi-sectoral and coordinated action, with scaled up resource allocation.

Members of the media,

There will be a press interview with the speakers after the sessions, and I would like you to support our efforts and try to ensure a wide coverage of the important issues raised at this seminar.

Thank you.