

## **PT FOUNDATION – UNITED NATIONS KICKS OFF HIV/AIDS CAMPAIGN**

*Aims To Address Stigma against People Living With HIV*

**Kuala Lumpur, March 19:** PT Foundation (formerly known as Pink Triangle) with the support of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) is rolling out a two month intensive grassroots campaign as part of their effort to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The campaign will culminate in the commemoration of International AIDS Memorial Day on 18 May, observed annually around the world to honour the memory of those lost to the disease. In 2007 alone, 2.1 million people died of AIDS-related diseases.

Themed “Never Give Up, Never Forget”, the campaign represents a two pronged strategy to provide a lifeline for people living with HIV (PLHIV) and advocate for behaviour change and safe sex.

It aims to heighten awareness about the impact of HIV/AIDS on all levels of Malaysian society as well as to fight social stigma and prejudice which hampers effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

To generate public support and urge families to take pro-active action to educate their loved ones about the disease, the campaign will initiate a petition for anti-discrimination against PLHIV, distribute car stickers and step up its outreach work among communities with high prevalence and risk of infection.

At the same time, Lite FM will be airing community service messages throughout the campaign while the Body Shop will help to raise funds for PT’s programmes via donation boxes at their outlets.

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"HIV/AIDS has emerged as a serious development challenge in Malaysia since the first case was detected over 20 years ago. It is time to take stock on how we've approached the problem in the past and what we need to do differently," said Hisham Hussein, Chairman of PT Foundation.

"We must change the mindset that HIV/AIDS is 'someone else's problem' which fuels the deeply entrenched stigma against PLHIV and drives vulnerable communities underground instead of seeking help."

Hisham added that some crucial components that can assist PLHIV and enhance the fight against HIV/AIDS include meaningful participation and inclusion of PLHIV in the design and implementation of programmes as well as protection by law against abuse and discrimination.

The event also saw the launch of a UNCT publication titled, "Impact of HIV," the first study in Malaysia to document the effects of HIV/AIDS on PLHIV, their families and society at the event.

"One of the most painful symptoms of HIV/AIDS is persistent stigmatization and discrimination, borne from ignorance, indifference and prejudice," said Dr. Richard Leete, UN Malaysia Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

"Despite various public health campaigns, we have found that PLHIV in Malaysia live in constant fear, which may prevent them from seeking treatment for AIDS or acknowledging their HIV status publicly.

"There is a need to scale up resources for community based organizations in order for them to expand their reach to vulnerable groups in society.

"The United Nations believes that every effort to fight AIDS at a global level is shaped and strengthened by the experiences of people confronting the disease on the ground and we are pleased to support PT Foundation in this vital role," Dr. Leete added.

According to the publication, Malaysia is home to one of the fastest growing AIDS epidemics in the East Asia and Pacific region with its current rate of HIV infections doubling every three years.

Between the first detected case in 1986 and 2006, 76,389\* people have been infected with HIV while 9,155\* have died of AIDS. These statistics suggest that an average of 16 people test positive for the virus each day. (\*source: Ministry of Health, 2006).

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Injecting drug users make up 72% of total cases, although heterosexual transmission is on the rise. The proportion of women reported with HIV has increased dramatically in the last decade from 4% of new cases in 1995 to 15% of new cases in 2006.

Surveys show that in 2006, more housewives tested HIV-positive than sex workers. At the same time, the percentage of babies born with HIV has also increased from 0.2% in 1991 to 1.4% in 2006.

Additionally, December 2006 statistics from the Ministry of Health reveal that 36% of infections are amongst people aged between 13 to 29 years old. It is likely that people infected with HIV before the age of 30 were infected in their twenties and sometimes even during their teens.

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**Note to Editor:**

**About UNCT:** *The United Nations (UN) family in Malaysia is represented by the Resident Coordinator (RC) system. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Malaysia is represented by five main UN agencies: UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO. The UNCT in Malaysia aligns its work to specific objectives in the following areas;*

- *Support to the national development process: Achieving the MDGs*
- *National capacity for development effectiveness*
- *Strengthened efforts on initiatives related to HIV/AIDS, gender equality and human rights*
- *Strengthened coordination capacity of the UNCT to support the UN reforms*

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**About PT Foundation:** *Founded in 1987, PT Foundation is a community-based, voluntary non-profit making organization providing HIV/AIDS education, prevention, care and support programmes for more than 20 years from five marginalized communities such as [drug users](#), [sex workers](#), [maknyah](#), [men who have sex with men \(MSM\)](#) and PLHIV.*

*In 2006, the organization was a finalist for the International Red Ribbon Award by the Joint United Nations Programme for HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).*

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