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Office of the Resident Coordinator Of The United Nations
System's Operational Activities For Development in Malaysia

PRESS RELEASE

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In commemoration of the World AIDS Day on 1 December 2006, the United Nations agencies in Malaysia organised a one-day seminar, with the theme "Strengthening Evidence Based Responses". The seminar was attended by representatives from the various key stakeholders in HIV/ AIDS prevention and control in Malaysia.

The theme for World AIDS Day 2006 is "Accountability" with the slogan "Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise". The theme reminds the world that every sector of society is responsible to keep the promises of implementing effective responses to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. Although promising developments have been seen in recent years in global efforts to address the global AIDS epidemic, the global AIDS epidemic continues to grow. As of December 2006, about 39.5 million people would have been living with HIV of which six percent (2.3 million) are children below the age of 15 years. In 2006 alone, it is estimated that there were a total of 4.3 million NEW infections with a 2.9 million AIDS deaths. The HIV/AIDS situation in Malaysia is also challenging. The Malaysian Ministry of Health reports that as of end 2005, 71, 000 Malaysians were HIV-positive, 75% of whom were due to injecting drug use, which represents a concentrated HIV AIDS epidemic.

As part of the integrated country response to the alarming situation, and strengthening development of effective, evidence-based public health approaches, the seminar presents the findings of recent UN-supported studies on HIV/AIDS in Malaysia that were conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Economic Planning Unit, the Malaysian AIDS Council, universities and NGOs. The evidence from these studies will contribute to a greater understanding of the response needed to address the epidemic in Malaysia.

"One challenge is formulating a culturally sensitive prevention strategy and another is in developing an evidence-based response to the epidemic. Only then can government agencies, the UN and civil society effectively address the epidemic," said Dr Richard Leete, United Nations Resident Coordinator.

Participants were also briefed on the progress of key initiatives, including the pilot national harm reduction programmes.

"We are pleased to support the Government's positive steps in meeting the Millennium Development Goal target of halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015, through Malaysia's National AIDS Strategic Plan, 2006-2010, and its related activities," said Dr Leete.

"The United Nations remains committed to working with government agencies, civil society and the private sector in managing HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment for all Malaysians, including marginalised groups such as the poor and refugees."

The UN Theme Group (UNTG) on HIV/AIDS, Malaysia provides joint UN support for collaboration through close partnership with all the key stakeholders in Malaysia. UNTG comprises representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Health Organization (WHO) which is the current Chair of the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS

Some 100 participants attended the conference, including representatives from UN agencies, government officials, non-governmental organisations, academics, and religious authorities and organisations.

The event also honoured the work of the Malaysia-based PT Foundation Mak Nyah, one of the winners of the Red Ribbon Award. The award, organised by UNDP in partnership with UNAIDS, is a new joint initiative of the Community and Leadership Programmes of the International AIDS Conference. It provides a unique opportunity to support and publicise the most outstanding and least recognised communities who are finding innovative and effective ways to address HIV/AIDS and secure livelihoods around the world.

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