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Opening Remarks

HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC, DRUG ADDICTION AND QUALITY OF LIFE FORUM

WOMEN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT/SENATORS AND STATE ASSEMBLIES

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Yang Berhormat Datuk Dr. Shafie Ooyub
Timbalan Ketua Pengarah, Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia

Yang Berhormat Datuk Hajah Rohani Abdul Karim
Setiausaha Parlimen (Parliamentary Secretary)
Kementerian Pertanian dan Industry Asas Tani

Ahli-Ahli Yang Berhormat Dewan Rakyat, Dewan Negara dan Dewan Undangan
Negeri-Negeri

Wakil dari semua Parti Politik dan juga NGO

Selamat pagi dan salam sejahtera kepada semua.

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

I would particularly like to thank Datuk Dr. Shafie Ooyub for gracing today's event and Datuk Hajah Rohani and AFPPD for organizing it.

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. The pandemic is hitting hardest in sub-Saharan Africa, and almost everywhere else the disease is on the rise.

Globally, an estimated 40.3 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2005, with women accounting for 46 per cent. Young people aged 15 to 24 accounts for half of all new HIV infections.

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 the two decades since the first HIV/AIDS case was reported, numbers have risen exponentially. Cumulatively, there were about 67,000 HIV/AIDS cases reported in Malaysia up to June 2005. And these are only the reported numbers.

Most infections in Malaysia occur among young Malay heterosexuals, and about 75 per cent of HIV/AIDS cases are among injecting drug users. Although HIV prevalence is less than 1 per cent among the Malaysian adult population, it is above 5 per cent among injecting drug users, and is still progressing.

Distinguished parliamentarians

For the most part, HIV/AIDS has not invoked an adequate sense of urgency among Malaysian policy makers. The fact that HIV/AIDS is confined to specific population sub-groups - drug users, sex workers, and homosexuals- distances the majority from the

problem of HIV/AIDS. The high level of stigma and discrimination that ensues leads to inaction. And yet, diseases know no sub-group boundaries.

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 appropriate resource allocation. We need to undertake a comprehensive study to assess the community, social and economic risk factors that lead to youth taking drugs and its implications on the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Ladies and gentlemen.

All the United Nations agencies are working hard to help reduce the spread of HIV infection in Malaysia. We fully support the bold initiative of the Health Ministry to make available clean needles to drug addicts and condoms to those who are sexually active. This evidence based approach allows for parallel secondary prevention programmes towards treatment and rehabilitation.

UNFPA is currently working with both government and non-government agencies in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention among young people in schools and factories. One important strategy adopted by UNFPA is the behavioural change communication tools to raise awareness of reproductive health and rights, particularly on HIV/AIDS. UNFPA recognizes that behavioural change is a lifelong process.

UNDP has partnered with the Economic Planning Unit, Ministry of Health, Department of Islamic Religious Affairs and Malaysian AIDS Council to involve religious leaders in the response to HIV/AIDS.

And we will work in partnership with government and other stakeholders towards meeting the goals and objectives of the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2006-2010 that is currently being finalized.

Distinguished parliamentarians

To conclude, meeting the MDG target of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS requires the involvement of people like yourselves. So please tell your constituents that they must teach their children, especially the boys, to be sexually responsible, and to respect their partners in marriage as equals, and as having rights of their own.

Thank you.