



## LOCAL UNIVERSITIES URGED TO PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE TO CURB THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS & SOCIAL PROBLEMS INVOLVING YOUTH

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Georgetown, 7 October 2011 – Many parties urged the local institutions of public and private higher learning (IPTA / IPTS) to leave their comfort zone and be more actively engaged with the society surrounding them. Their involvement should not limit to their traditional role as centres of excellence in knowledge, teaching, education and research but their staff and students should be more directly involved and concerned with the current social issues, particularly the importance of tackling and finding solutions to issues relevant to youth and younger generation.

Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) has fostered a multipartite collaboration with the Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) to organise a one-day exclusive seminar, entitled "*Seminar & Exhibition Programme of HIV / AIDS*" on October 7, 2011 in Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra, USM, Penang. The seminar has attracted the participation of 100 USM students and employees, where they were educated about the basics of HIV and AIDS, challenges of stigma and discrimination faced by People Living With HIV (PLHIV) as well as the importance of adopting Harm Reduction strategy in mitigating the spread of HIV and AIDS in the society. The seminar also stresses the importance of emotional and moral support, advisory assistance, medical care and support for PLHIV, especially to the marginalized communities. Participants are also given the exposure on how to create a conducive environment in Harm Reduction in drug abuse, mainly for injecting drug users and how the spread of HIV/AIDS gives a prominent effect to the wives / partners, children and their families.

The opening ceremony of the seminar and exhibition program of HIV / AIDS was launched by a representative of USM, Prof. Madya Dr. Ismail Baba, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, on behalf of the Vice Chancellor USM, Prof. Dato'Omar Osman and witnessed by President MAC, YBhg Tan Sri Zaman Khan, Haji Zakuan Sawai, Senior Assistant Director, Division of Family, Social and Community Development, Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), MAC Executive Director Roswati Ghani, Khairil Ismahafiz Muhadzir, DagangHalal.com Chief Executive Officer, representatives from the Ministry of Health (MOH), Penang Islamic Religious Department (JAIP), Islamic Religious Council Selangor (MAIS), officials from other ministries, government agencies and students and staff of the USM as well as media representatives.

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"Today's programme is a social obligation of the joint venture USM, MAM, JAKIM, JAIP and the Ministry of Health in assisting the Government in an effort to absolve our human capital from the behavior that deviates from the norms of society. Through this collaboration, hopefully we will be able to extend our agenda of the struggle to control the spread of HIV/AIDS and subsequently, to foster stronger commitment from all the authorities," Tan Sri Mohd Zaman Khan in his keynote address at the opening ceremony.

"USM placed a premium on efforts to cultivate future leaders that are not only experts in multidisciplinary field, but are also capable of conveying empathy towards social issues of public importance, such as the spread of HIV and AIDS in Malaysia. "" said Prof. Dato 'Omar Osman, Vice Chancellor, USM. The text of his speech was read by Prof. Madya Dr. Ismail Baba, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, USM. He also added, "We at USM are committed to the agenda of HIV and AIDS. Our commitment is proven through the research work in this field conducted by our researchers, including AIDS Research and Action Group (AIDS Action and Research Group, AARG) which is based in the USM's School of Social Sciences. Through the research work, learning and training and social action activities, AARG has much to offer the Government's efforts in controlling the spread of HIV / AIDS. "

The first case of HIV/AIDS were diagnosed in Malaysia in 1986 in which two Malaysians have died of AIDS-related cases. In 2010, a total of 91,362 cases of HIV were reported by MOH and 47.4% of HIV infections accounted by injecting drug users while 48.7% reported HIV infection through sexual intercourse (heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual). Based on the estimated size in 2009, the Ministry of Health reported that injecting drug users in Malaysia has recorded about 170,000 people, while a survey of bio-behavioral recently in and around Kuala Lumpur only has recorded an HIV prevalence of 22.5% falls of injecting drug users.

Tan Sri Mohd Zaman said, "Through our history and our commitment to take up issues related to HIV and AIDS, MAC has embarked on various initiatives and activities aimed at improving the lives of Malaysians who are living with HIV, especially underprivileged and marginalised community members."

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Tan Sri Mohd Zaman also added that the issues related to stigma and discrimination against PLHIV are now at alarming levels, "it is important and cannot be ignored because it can affect the global public health, education, the country's productivity and socio-economic development in the near future."

However, the media coverage is still fully extensive and most often, have sparked controversy, and the evaluation of its impact on HIV incidence and prevalence have not yet carried out effectively, but a positive impact on the programs carried out by MAC with strong co-operation with strategic partners has been clearly proven. Extensive awareness and education on the benefits of harm reduction and efforts to eliminate the myths involving HIV and AIDS by the surrounding community is also expected.

Tuan Hj Zakuan Sawai, Senior Assistant Director, Division of Family, Social and Community, JAKIM also explained that JAKIM also plays in educating the public through awareness campaigns and guidance have been implemented in each of its programs with the public. Close co-operation between strategic partners, including Ministry of Health, police task force, Islamic Religious State Department and NGOs also have reduced the spread of HIV / AIDS and social problems among youth by increasing awareness and understanding of society in addressing the issue.

According to Vice Chancellor USM, Prof. Dato' Omar, the university welcomes "its campus involvement in community-based support activities. Volunteerism is fostered on campus would have led to the formation of personality and individual excellence which is sensitive to the needs of society".

At present, people in Malaysia and around the world would like to see the return of accountability and how each institution of higher learning can assist its students as final products of IPTA / IPTS in building and helping the society at large, especially PLHIV, in terms of economic stability, knowledge, social and community development.

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**ABOUT MALAYSIAN AIDS COUNCIL**

The Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) was established in 1992 to serve as an umbrella organisation to support and coordinate the efforts of organisations working on HIV/AIDS issues in Malaysia. MAC, in partnership with government agencies, private sector

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and international organisations, ensures a committed and effective response by NGOs working on HIV/AIDS issues in Malaysia. MAC, comprising the Secretariat and its Partner Organisations, work together as a team to provide nationwide coverage and serve as the common voice for the community. Besides coordinating and streamlining programmes with its Partner Organisations, the MAC Secretariat also provides these organisations with the necessary training, funds and other resources to implement effective HIV/AIDS programmes within various communities in Malaysia. For more information on MAC, kindly log on to its dedicated website, [www.mac.org.my](http://www.mac.org.my).

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