



## **MAC: RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DRUGS AND HIV MANDATORY**

*Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) Human Rights Mitigation Report 2013 released in conjunction with Support. Don't Punish. campaign evokes grave concern over cases of HIV discrimination*

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**KUALA LUMPUR, 26 June 2014** – Protection of basic human rights to health for society's most vulnerable and marginalised remains the cornerstone of a successful HIV and drug policy, Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) emphasised today at a press conference to release its Human Rights Mitigation Report 2013 in conjunction with the United Nations' International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The MAC Human Rights Mitigation Report 2013, made possible through the European Union Asia Action grant, describes 17 cases of HIV associated discrimination that were reported to MAC in the past year involving instances of arbitrary arrests of drug users by law enforcement officers, deprivation of access to antiretroviral and other essential medicines in custodial settings and students' diplomas being withheld on account of their HIV positive status, among others.

"We are deeply concerned by these discriminatory cases as they directly reflect the extent of stigma against people living with HIV that is still prevalent in Malaysia. We are also dismayed to learn that key affected populations especially people who use drugs continue to be the target of harassment by law enforcement entities. We remain committed to addressing discriminatory practices and structural barriers that impede access to HIV treatment, harm reduction and other public health services and will continue to form strategic partnerships with the relevant authorities and Government agencies to improve the situation," explained MAC President Datuk Dr. Raj Karim.

The press event also saw the launch of the Support. Don't Punish. campaign, a global advocacy initiative to raise awareness of the harms caused by the criminalisation of people who use drugs and promote a more effective and humane approach to drugs that is based on public health and human rights. This was marked by a presentation on the latest findings of HIV and drug related research in Malaysia, delivered by Prof. Dr. Adeeba Kamarulzaman, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya who also heads the operations of the Centre of Excellence for Research in AIDS (CERiA), Malaysia's sole HIV/AIDS dedicated research centre.



“Studies conducted by CERiA prove that harm reduction services such as the needle and syringe exchange programme and methadone maintenance therapy have successfully averted over 12,653 new HIV infections since 2006, which have yielded savings of RM47.1 million in direct health costs for the Government. Another recent study on the National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK) Cure & Care Centres revealed that more than 72 per cent of the people who use drugs receiving methadone treatment there improved their family relations, obtained permanent homes and stayed out of prisons. In the face of such strong scientific evidence, we cannot in good conscience continue applying harmful drug laws and punitive measures that have only fueled health crises and devastated lives. We simply must reform our approach,” said Prof. Adeeba.

Support. Don't Punish. is supported by a coalition of over 100 NGOs around the world. In Malaysia, the campaign is led by MAC. A series of events throughout the entire day was held in the vicinity of KL Sentral here to improve the awareness of the public on the effectiveness of harm reduction and rights-based approach to drug issues, such as a mobile exhibition and dissemination of flyers and posters.

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#### **ABOUT THE 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 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)

#### **Contact**

Media & Communications Department, Malaysian AIDS Council

Zaki Arzmi | +6016 292 2948 | [zaki@mac.org.my](mailto:zaki@mac.org.my)

Meera Abi | +6016 414 6400 | [meera@mac.org.my](mailto:meera@mac.org.my)