FEDERATION OF FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATIONS, MALAYSIA
(A member of International Planned Parenthood Federation)

NATIONAL ADVOCACY SEMINAR FOR MEDIA
8 JULY 2006, THE CITY BAYVIEW HOTEL, PULAU LANGKAWI

Opening Speech
by
Yang Amat Berhormat Dato’ Seri Mahadzir Bin Khalid
Chief Minister of Kedah Darul Aman
(represented by YB Dato’ Chong Itt Chew)

Dr. Richard Leete
United Nations Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative and UNFPA Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam

Dr. Kamaruzaman Ali
Chairman, Federation of Family Planning Associations, Malaysia

Honorable members of the Steering Committee and Working Committee of the UNFPA Project MYSOR208: Protecting Young Malaysians from HIV and STIs

Distinguished Guests and Speakers, Members of the Media, Young People

Ladies and Gentlemen …

On behalf of the YAB Dato’ Seri Mahadzir Bin Khalid, Chief Minister of Kedah and the people of Kedah, I extend our warmest welcome to all of you to this Seminar in the beautiful island of Pulau Langkawi.

It is indeed heartening to see the coming together of so many people at this auspicious seminar, not only from the media but also young people and teachers from the schools and colleges, representatives from like-minded agencies such as United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Ministry and Department of Health, Ministry and Department
of Education, National Population and Family Development Board under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Ministry and Department of Information, Economic Planning Unit (Prime Minister’s Department), Ministry and Department of Youth and Sports, Malaysian Association of Youth Clubs, Pusat Serenti, Malaysian AIDS Council and service providers, teachers and volunteers involved in implementing the activities at the ground level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your coming together signifies the importance of a committed multi-sectoral approach involving all agencies and people from all walks of life to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of “Halt and reverse the spread of HIV by the year 2015”.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Malaysia is no longer a health related matter – it affects all aspects of development and therefore we have to “walk the talk”. Efforts of prevention, control and care of HIV/AIDS in Malaysia have been more than 15 years, but the rising trends of annual reported HIV/AIDS cases in the country indicate that much more need to be done and remains a challenge.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is on the rise. Globally in 2005 people newly infected with HIV totalled 4.9 million and AIDS death was 3.1 million. 40.3 million are living with HIV.

The Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation had projected that there would be over 300,000 Malaysians with HIV by 2015. Currently, the cumulative total is 71,676. Over 6,000 Malaysians could be infected with HIV annually if no effective measures were taken to address this challenge.
Our Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak heads the Cabinet Committee on HIV/AIDS. This shows the seriousness of the government to put a stop to the spread of HIV. Furthermore, our Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Chua Soi Lek had also announced that the Ministry of Health was planning a RM22 million media campaign to make Malaysians more aware of current health issues – one of which was to educate the public on the dangers and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Previously the health of young people had been neglected because we had assumed that they are a healthy population. Today we recognize that young people have health challenges too that are specific and peculiar to their age group. One of the key challenges identified through the local and national reproductive survey was HIV and AIDS.

Forty percent of those infected with HIV are young Malaysians aged below 29 years of age. Empowerment of young people to make safe and responsible choices and decisions is the key to check the spread of HIV. The ability to make decisions rests very much on the type of information available to the young people. Thus as you have read in the newspapers recently, YB Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development had indicated that sexual education is likely to be in the school curriculum next year. Like you, the government also knows how important education is, in the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

We are happy that the Federation of Family Planning Associations, with funding from UNFPA and approved by the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister’s Department has together with a coalition of partners, embarked on a new initiative to use the “power” of peer educators to effect behaviour change leading to adoption of healthy and responsible lifestyle.
We are also pleased that the Family Planning Associations (FPAs) of Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka and Penang are involved in implementing the project activities in the various locations.

I also understand that there is good collaboration and networking amongst the FPAs and their various partners at the state.

The media, without doubt plays a crucial role in educating the public on HIV/AIDS. It is also my fervent hope that the media, both print and electronic will provide more coverage on HIV/AIDS. Perhaps at this Seminar, the media representatives can also provide recommendations on how to check the increasing trend of HIV infection.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Federation of Family Planning Associations, Malaysia for inviting YAB Dato’ Seri Mahadzir Bin Khalid to deliver the Opening Speech and I on behalf of YAB wish you all every success in this Seminar.

I now officially declare the “National Advocacy Seminar for Media on HIV Prevention” open.