

Anti-discrimination policy for HIV-positive employees in workplace needed: PM



Also present was Dr Mahathir's wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, MAF patron Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir (left), meanwhile, Matron Fadzilah Abdul Hamid (3rd from left) was named as the recipient of the Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Award 2018. Pic by NSTP/MUHD ZAABA ZAKERIA

By Manirajan Ramasamy (/authors/manirajan-ramasamy) - December 16, 2018 @ 11:14pm

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on Malaysian employers to support the implementation of a policy which protects employees who are HIV-positive from being stigmatised and discriminated against in the workplace.

He singled out Petronas as a model for such a move, as the company has an anti-discrimination policy for HIV-positive employees in place – one which is in line with international best practices.

Dr Mahathir said that according to statistics, 89 per cent of Malaysians who are HIV-positive are in the prime of their lives, and they have much to contribute.

The Prime Minister said this in his speech – which was read on his behalf by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad – at the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Awards Gala Dinner 2018 at the KL Hilton here, tonight.

Also present was Dr Mahathir's wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, MAF patron Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir and its chairman, Professor Datuk Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman.

Dr Mahathir said that HIV has a direct impact on businesses, and it is therefore crucial for Malaysia to invest in a policy which will provide support for those who are HIV-positive in the workplace.

"HIV discrimination is unlawful and should not be tolerated in this day and age," he said, adding that the Malaysian Business Consortium on HIV/AIDS at the MAF should push ahead with its initiative to introduce policies that protect HIV-positive workers.

On a related matter, Dr Mahathir said that the rate of HIV infection in Malaysia has dramatically declined in the last two decades, with only 115 new infections reported in 2017.

"This success points to the important principle of setting policies that are based on evidence and science, and global best practices, no matter how unpopular or controversial they may be," he said.



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Despite this achievement, the Prime Minister stressed that the battle against the disease is far from over, with 90 per cent of transmissions occurring through unsafe sex.

“Some may not want to talk about sex. (But) it is about time we do so in the context of public health.

“We cannot sit on our moral high ground and look for who to blame for this occurrence. We need to be pragmatic. We need to continue saving lives.

“All stakeholders, including civil societies, need to intensify their HIV prevention services for key populations. And they must be allowed to do their jobs, whether in sex education or promoting the concept of safe sex,” he said.

Dr Mahathir also raised the issue of stigmatisation of people with HIV by society at large, and how it is a major stumbling block to effectively responding to the spread of the disease.

“Because of stigma, people are wary of taking the first step of being tested. Testing is key to knowing one’s status, and if one tests positive, one can then move forward to get the necessary treatment which allows one to lead an essentially normal, healthy and productive life,” he added.

Meanwhile, Matron Fadzilah Abdul Hamid was named as the recipient of the Tun Dr Siti Harmah Award 2018.

Fadzilah has been a veteran HIV response nurse for 30 years and helped establish Rumah Solehah, a shelter home for HIV-positive women and children.

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