

PM: Workplace policies must not discriminate against employees with HIV

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Prime Minister's wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali (centre) together with Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) chairman Datuk Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman (left) and Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (right) at the MAF Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Award Gala Dinner 2018 on Sunday

KUALA LUMPUR: Employers should put into place sound workplace policies that do not stigmatise and discriminate employees who are infected by HIV, says Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said statistics have shown that up to 89% of people with HIV in the country are those who are in the prime of their lives and make up a key part of the working population.

He explained that HIV has a direct impact on businesses and it is crucial for the country to invest in a policy that will provide support for those infected and affected by HIV at the workplace.

"HIV discrimination is unlawful and should not be tolerated in this day and age," he said.

Dr Mahathir commended Petronas for having HIV workplace policies that are in line with international best practices.

"In recent weeks several Cabinet members too have stressed on the importance of having a regulation to stop discrimination of HIV-positive employees," added Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister also noted that the infection rate has declined quite dramatically, with only 115 new infections reported in 2017 compared with 5,176 in 2002.

"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 it may be.

"Despite these achievements, the battle is far from over. The virus in Malaysia is now driven by sexual transmission where 90% of all new infections are transmitted through sex.

"And while some may not want to talk about sex, it is about time we do 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 HIV prevention services to key populations.

And they must be allowed to do their jobs whether in sex education or promoting the concept of safe sex," said Dr Mahathir at the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Award gala dinner 2018 on Sunday (Dec 16).

His speech text was read by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

Dr Mahathir also noted that stigma and discrimination continues to be a stumbling block in the country's response to combat the illness.

"More often than not, it is because of stigma and discrimination that all the good work is hampered.

"The equation is simple. Because of stigma, people, whether they are part of the key population or not, are wary to even take the first step of being tested.

"Testing is key to knowing one's status and if they test positive, they can then move forward to get the necessary treatment which allows them to lead essentially normal, healthy and productive lives," he said.

Also present at the event was Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye, Deputy Education Minister Teo Nie Ching and Star Media Group managing director and chief executive officer Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai.

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