

3R-UNICEF All Women's Futsal Playoffs 2007

Southern Championships Johor Bahru • Saturday, 17 November 2007

Speech by

YAM Raja Zarith Sofiah binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to be with you this morning at the launch of the first of three futsal championships organised by Malaysia's popular TV program 3R, together with the United Nations Children's Fund in support of UNICEF's *Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS* campaign.

This is a wonderful celebration of both young girls and women in Malaysia, and in particular, to give out the message that there is a great need for an awareness and knowledge about HIV and AIDS. We all need to be educated about this disease and the ways we can protect ourselves from being infected.

In Malaysia, as in other Asian countries, HIV and AIDS are taboo subjects. Often, when a woman gets infected with HIV, she be outcast by her family. If she is pregnant, and the child is born HIV positive, then the child too will be unwanted. It is not an exaggeration to say that most women and children with HIV often become social outcasts.

So far, in Malaysia, 76,000 people have already been infected with HIV. What is terribly distressing is the rising rates of HIV infection among both our girls and women. In 1990, the statistics showed that only 1 in every 86 new HIV infections were women. However, as of end 2006, the numbers of women who had become infected with HIV had risen to 1 in 7. That is a huge jump.

The rising number of HIV infections among Malaysian women is alarming and so it is important that we take measures to make sure that the numbers do not rise even more.

We must try and not put women who are infected with HIV to be hidden away or unaccepted by our society. If we are to help them, then we must make them part of our society and part of our responsibility. In other words, we have to establish a sort of sisterhood of women where we help each other, and we support each other. Some of these women are married and have children. When they are told they have been infected by HIV, their whole world collapses. So they need our support. We have to somehow get rid of the concept of "them" and "us" – we shouldn't ostracise them.

One of the many ways in which we can help the numbers of HIV infection among our fellow women is to give them access to information, services and resources which will tell teach them the ways to avoid being infected and to protect themselves from this infection.

What is of the utmost importance therefore is to offer them an accurate knowledge about HIV. Ignorance about this disease will only lead to higher statistics of those infected by it, but the awareness of this disease will help to decrease the number of HIV cases among our women.

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I would like to express my gratitude to 3R and UNICEF for organising this event. I understand that 3R and UNICEF are working together with the AIESEC youth peer educators to provide HIV education to school girls in Johor, Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

I would also like to thank the Manchester United Football Club for their generous support of these HIV workshops, as well as the Girls' Futsal's Program through its "United for UNICEF" partnership.

Let us all, together, fight against HIV by arming ourselves with both an awareness as well as a knowledge about it.

Thank you.