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DATUK Amar Hajah Jamilah Anu assisted by Dato' Maznah Ja'il (third left) and Prof. Datuk Dr. Adeeba Kamarulzaman (second left) cutting the ribbon to officially open the 'Teratak Kasih Tok Nan' Kuching One Stop Support Centre Malaysian AIDS Foundation and Malaysian AIDS Council while others look on.

PHOTO: RAMIDI SUBARI

State's first HIV, AIDS one stop support centre launched

BY DESMOND MARKUS

KUCHING: The first One Stop Support Centre for HIV and AIDS infected community in Sarawak was launched by its patron Datuk Amar Datin Patinggi Hajah Jamilah Anu, at Kuarters Padi, Jalan Crookshank, here yesterday.

It is the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF)'s response to the single largest barrier to HIV continuum of care in Sarawak as the state's geographical diversity that impedes access to otherwise readily available services.

The centre is named "Teratak Kasih Tok Nan" after Jamilah late husband, Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Adenan Satem, the fifth chief minister of Sarawak whose leadership was instrumental in initiating the state Government's response to AIDS.

"It is the first community-based facility established in Sarawak to serve men, women and children infected by HIV and AIDS,

"'Teratak Kasih Tok Nan' symbolises our hope and care for the people of Sarawak whose leaders and civil society in recent times have shown great passion and commitment to ending AIDS," remarked Chairman of the MAF, Professor Dato' Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman.

She said, "It is also a place where we hope the communities affected by HIV and AIDS would grow and thrive towards improved health and social outcomes.

"The centre offers community-based HIV testing, counselling, treatment lit-

eracy, and legal and welfare service referrals, in addition to providing life skills training and other social reintegration support to its beneficiaries," she added.

The Malaysian AIDS Foundation Kuching Gala, a star-studded charity dinner was held in December last year to benefit this project. It raised over RM500,000.

"The AIDS epidemic in Sarawak began in 1989, three years after the first HIV case was detected in Malaysia. By the end of 2016, a total of 2,436 HIV infections were recorded, of which 542 resulted in AIDS-related deaths,

"Although the number of infections is small, there has been a marked increase in yearly new HIV infections in the past five years, from 147 cases in 2011 to 258 in 2016,

"Through the One Stop Support Centre, we can create opportunities to effectively address this issue by providing HIV and AIDS education, awareness and empowerment directly to people most affected," she disclosed.

The centre is being run by the Sarawak AIDS Concern Society (SACS), a Partner Organisation of the Malaysia AIDS Council.

"The One Stop Support Centre is critical to the well-being of the communities we serve. As people living with HIV continue to be pushed away due to stigma and discrimination, a safe space is necessary to ensure that their needs are met and their voices heard," said President of the SACS, Dr Yuwana Podin.