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◆ COMMUNITY

# Putting up a fight

**Non-discrimination, easy accessibility to cure, care, backing, a winning formula**

NEARLY 25,000 delegates from across the world, including Malaysia, deliberated on the theme "Rights Here, Right Now" at the recent 18th bi-annual International AIDS Conference in Vienna, Austria.

Achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, the cornerstone to addressing the global AIDS crisis, cannot be realised without guaranteeing basic rights for all people, especially those most at risk and the marginalised.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), globally each day about 7,400 persons are newly infected with HIV and almost 5,500 die of AIDS. For every two treated, five new infections occur.

In 2008, there were in excess of 33 million people living with HIV, nearly three million new infections and two million AIDS-related deaths. It is of even greater concern that in the same year, about half a million children were born with HIV.

Young people of between 15 and 24 years old account for around 40 per cent of all new adult HIV infections worldwide.

Closer to home, between 1986 and 2008, according to HIV/AIDS statistics, 84,630 men, women and children have been infected with HIV while just over 11,000 have died of AIDS.

HIV infection in Malaysia is mainly due to injecting drug use (IDU) while it is believed that heterosexual transmission is on the rise. Also, most infections are among males, but those among women has also been increasing.

Close to a third of new infections are among young people aged 15 to 30.

We must recognise that HIV/AIDS is not only a serious threat

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to health and life, but the loss in human capital and productivity caused by this epidemic will, if unchecked, translate into disturbing social and economic consequences now and in the future.

It is known that several social and cultural factors, such as sexual norms, gender inequality, HIV-related stigma, discrimination, silence, denial and ignorance, drastically increase

the risk behaviours that expose people to HIV transmission.

Also, increased HIV transmission results from failure to use the available and effective prevention strategies and tools, or simply, the unavailability of these measures and services as widely and effectively as possible to the majority of people in need, especially those at high risk of exposure to HIV.

Addressing the HIV/AIDS cri-

sis is one of the most formidable challenges to human life and dignity as well as to the effective enjoyment of human rights.

Increasing services and coverage, and reinforcing coordination among government, community and international agencies and NGOs will undoubtedly strengthen and help win the fight against HIV/AIDS in our country.

**Rueben Dudley**  
**Petaling Jaya, Selangor**

Activists from the group ActionAid demonstrate outside a hotel during the final day of meetings of international donors at the Global Fund to Fight AIDS —  
GETTYPIC

