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World mourns loss of HIV/AIDS experts

By Audrey Edwards

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PETALING JAYA — Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman woke up for *sahur* in Melbourne only to hear the tragic news of what happened to Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17. The grief hit home when she was informed that a group of colleagues and friends had been on board enroute there for the International AIDS Society (IAS) conference.

"I didn't stop crying. I stopped for a while but started crying again during one of the sessions," she said yesterday.

"It is just terrible. I couldn't believe it when I first heard about it."

Dr Adeeba, who is an IAS governing council member and Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman, said she received a phone call informing her of the tragic news including that leading HIV/AIDS researcher Prof Dr Jeop Lange was among those who perished and it has been reported that as many as 100 of them were onboard.

"We have lost a giant who has been in the game since the beginning of the epidemic. He never lost his energy and it is a huge loss. Although we don't know exactly how many others were onboard, they all had a major role to play," she said.

She said Dr Lange, who started the HIV Netherlands Australia Research Collaboration (HIV-NAT) based in Thailand, was very focused on his work and was concerned about having equal access to treatment for HIV positive individuals in developed and developing countries.

He was also former president for the IAS and was a leading Dutch academic research-

er.

Dr Adeeba said a memorial would be held during the conference tomorrow, once it was confirmed who were onboard.

"The fight will go on," she said.

Adding that she was in Boston for a conference when MH370 went missing, Dr Adeeba said: "If this second tragedy to befall us doesn't unite us as a nation, I don't know what will. Take a good hard look at ourselves as a nation and come together as one."

Former Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said it was an enormous loss not only to the battle against AIDS but for the world.

"It is really going to set us back," she said.

Reuters reported that David Cooper, a professor at the Kirby Institute at the University of New South Wales, who worked closely with Dr Lange on a HIV research project in Bangkok, saying that the Dutchman always brought a fresh view, a unique take on things and never accepted that something was impossible to achieve.

Kirby Institute said he was travelling with his partner, Jacqueline.

Chris Beyrer, president elect of the IAS conference organiser, told reporters in Melbourne that the organisation stood with its international family and extended condolences to the loved ones of those who have been lost to this tragedy.

World Health Organisation media spokesman Glenn Thomas was also among the passengers of the ill-fated flight.

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