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Major boost for equality

THE Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) and Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) extend their congratulations to transgender rights advocate Nisha Ayub for being a recipient of the 2016 United States Secretary of State International Women of Courage Award at a ceremony in Washington last week.

Nisha is a co-founder of two non-governmental organisations serving transgender people in Malaysia, Pertubuhan Kebajikan dan Persekitaran Positif Malaysia and Justice for Sisters.

Her stellar work led to a landmark ruling by the Court of Appeal in 2014 which made state laws against cross-dressing unconstitutional and discriminatory. That decision, however, was overturned a year later by the Federal Court.

“We are proud of what Nisha has accomplished in seeking fair and just treatment for, and challenging public’s negative views, perceptions and stereotypes of transgender people,” MAC president Datuk Dr Raj Karim said.

“Evidence has shown discrimination against and persecution of transgenders have a direct negative impact on their access to HIV prevention, treatment and care. In Malaysia, transgenders are

disproportionately affected by HIV, with an HIV prevalence 14 times higher than the general population.”

MAC hopes this recognition will pave the way for greater understanding of transgender issues and ultimately improved health and social outcomes for transgenders.

MAF chairman Prof Dr Ádeeba Kamarulzaman commends Nisha for her courage to stay true to her identity and perseverance in facing adversity.

“MAF will continue to stand by the transgender community and, through its sister organisation the MAC, remain committed to supporting HIV interventions that effect change in the lives of transgender people,” she said.

Nisha is the first transgender to be recognised by the International Women of Courage Award. In its 10th year, the award honours women from around the world who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality and women’s empowerment, often at great personal risk.

MALAYSIAN AIDS COUNCIL
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US Secretary of State John Kerry with the recipients of the Women of Courage award in Washington last week. On his right is Nisha. — Picture by AFP