WHO joins partners to beef up AIDS strategy

KUALA LUMPUR: Officials of the World Health Organisation and their partner agencies are in Malaysia to finalise a regional strategy for harm reduction in relation to HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific for 2010-2015.

WHO regional director for Western Pacific Dr Shin Young-soo said the new strategy would take into account problems that had emerged from the changing nature of HIV/AIDS epidemic.

These problems include new drugs such as amphetamine-type substances and the growing threat from co-infection with hepatitis C.

He said one of the objectives of the strategy was to scale up needle and syringe programmes as well as voluntary drug treatment and social rehabilitation, apart from providing affordable testing and counselling and treatment for HIV and hepatitis B and C patients.

The strategy was developed by the United Nations Regional Task Force on Injecting Drug Use and HIV/AIDS for Asia and the Pacific with WHO, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNAIDS in consultation with member states.

Dr Shin said WHO will help member states develop their plans by analysing roadblocks and barriers in the way of universal access to comprehensive and quality treatment for HIV.

"The bottom line is that the health sector cannot impact the HIV/AIDS epidemic all by itself," Dr Shin said, adding that only a new multisectoral strategy, built and owned by all stakeholders, could halt HIV/AIDS.

He also said WHO studies showed that HIV/AIDS in Asia was now mainly driven by drug use.

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> *— Dr Shin Young-soo*
> *WHO regional director*
> *for Western Pacific*