

Headline **Pledge to raise sexual awareness**
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Pledge to raise sexual awareness

MALAYSIA has joined five countries in pledging to increase efforts to instil awareness about sexual and reproductive rights among the people to reduce cases of unwanted pregnancy and contain the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

The pledge was made by members of parliament and affiliated members of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) from Malaysia, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and Mongolia at the close of the four-day exchange visit and meeting themed "Investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights: Sharing of experiences among key stakeholders" yesterday.

The meeting was held in the Philippines as 80 per cent of young Filipinas did not know their fertile period and only two per cent knew that the menstrual cycle was related to pregnancy. Many of its youth also had their first sexual encounter before the age of 15.

Studies also showed that half of the youth was unaware they could get pregnant after one sexual intercourse. Almost 10 per cent of Filipinas aged 15 to 19 have already given birth and adolescent pregnancy is 30 per cent of all annual births.

It was also disclosed that poor and uneducated women got married and gave birth earlier in life and had more children than women with higher education, and that more than 60 per cent of all pregnancies were classified as high risk.

Eleven Filipinas died daily due to pregnancy and childbirth-related complications and more than half of

yearly maternal deaths were unreported.

It was also revealed during the meeting that 95 per cent of women who died from pregnancy and childbirth complications came from developing countries.

Federation of Reproductive Health Association Malaysia vice-president Tan Sri Napsiah Omar said: "Although the situation in Malaysia is not as serious as in some developing countries, the government has taken several proactive measures to contain it by providing maternal, prenatal and post-natal education, care and services. We are also soon to conduct sexual reproductive health (SRH) education in schools."

She said SRH must be taught to both boys and girls to prevent unplanned pregnancies and to stop spread of sexually-transmitted diseases.

She added that it was also to instil in people the correct attitudes, beliefs and values on sexual development, behaviour and health in the context of positive moral and spiritual development.

"I think that education and counselling on sexuality and SRH are very important, especially with girls and boys reaching puberty at a much younger age nowadays."

The issues prevailing in Malaysia, such as teenage pregnancies, illegal abortions, baby dumping and HIV/AIDS, could be effectively reduced or resolved if everyone, including non-governmental organisations, politicians, community leaders and parents, played a more pivotal role, she added.

IPPF East and Southeast Asia and Oceanic region programme manager

Romy Arca said their main aim was to improve the quality of lives of individuals through advocacy of sexual health and reproductive rights, and through services, especially for the poor and vulnerable in society.

"We defend the rights of all young people to enjoy their sexual lives free from ill-health, unwanted pregnancy, violence and discrimination and for a woman's right to choose to terminate her pregnancy legally and safely."

FACTS & FIGURES

Sex and youth

2%

Number of young Filipinas who know menstrual cycle is related to pregnancy

15

The age at which a Filipino youth has his or her first sexual experience



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IPPF East and Southeast Asia and Oceanic region programme manager Romy Arca says the federation seeks to improve quality of live.